

So what is it that haunts you at night? I'm not talking about the monster in your closet or under your bed. I'm talking about the scary things that don't disappear just because you pulled the covers over your head. The things that follow you even after daybreak, that keep you from being able to concentrate and steal your peace of mind away from you at every opportunity. Though we may share many in common, by and large our monsters are unique to each of us. Yet the end results are pretty much the same. Worry. Doubt. Fear. Even despair.

So what are they, or what have they been? What trouble has surfaced in your life that you just don't know how you're going to get past? Who do you know that's hurting that you don't know how to help them be okay again? What is it in the chaos of your daily life that you're afraid could happen that you're not prepared for? What is going on that you don't know how to cope with? Maybe it's nothing like that. Maybe it's all of them. Maybe in addition to that your mind has to reach further out and worry about the state of our nation and the world at large. Perhaps this Independence Day weekend has got you thinking that the glorious U.S. of A. just isn't all it used to be, and you're worried about how it's all going to turn out. Maybe you're worried about worldly atrocities and you're wondering just how long things can keep on going this way. We could spend all day here cataloguing the various things we are each worried about, things we're afraid of in our lives, but I think you get the idea. Whatever it is that haunts you in the quiet moments of your life, these sorts of fears are things we are all familiar with.

It might surprise us a little to learn that with all our individual questions and individual fears and worries, each unique to us, God has only one simple answer. And it's not even a cop-out answer. It really is one simple response that does answer all our questions and puts all our fears and worries to rest. To see this, let's take another look at a man who was worried, probably afraid, perhaps even despairing; Jairus. <Read text: Mark 5:21-24a, 35-43>.

There may be no heartache in life greater than the prospect of a parent who outlives their child. Obviously that is not something I have personally experienced. But to me, that situation drives home the corruption of our sinful world like nothing else. Death itself is the starkest lesson of the wages of sin, but the death of a child before a parent screams so much more, "This isn't how it should be!" I cannot begin to imagine the desperation and fear that was going through Jairus' mind as he watched his little girl grow ill. Or the frenzied hope he had when he heard that this great prophet Jesus was on his way to their town. Jairus did not doubt that Jesus was capable of healing his daughter. But would he help? Would he arrive in time to help? The panic, the worry, the doubt is palpable.

Certainly there was some degree of relief when Jesus agreed to go with him. But would they make it in time. Along the way they were detained, and we can only imagine Jairus' emotions during this delay. Because then it comes crashing down. "**Your daughter is dead.**" (v35).

Was his heart ready to burst? Was he about to fall down sobbing in desperation? Was the shock so sudden that he was stunned, paralyzed? Whatever reaction, Jesus did not give him time to live in it. He immediately reassures Jairus with such simple words. "**Don't be afraid; just believe.**" (v36).

Perhaps to us, the comfort is immediate and obvious. After all, we know our Savior Jesus very well. And moreover, we know how this particular story ends. But to drive home the point we need to make for ourselves today, put yourself in Jairus' sandals. Your daughter is dead. And Jesus simply says to you, "Don't be afraid; just believe." Is that enough for you? Will you simply get up and continue to follow him? Or are you going to bombard him with questions to make him explain such a vague statement? "Don't be afraid, like she's in a better place? Believe that you'll heal her anyway? Believe that you'll take away the pain I feel? What you just said could mean anything, Jesus! Tell me what's going to happen!"

Jairus? No. You see, Jairus understood some basic facts about the situation. Jesus came with him to help. The fact that Jesus was still going with him meant he still intended to help. "Just believe," was what Jesus told him to do. So he did. God was coming to help him. That was all he needed to know. What *form* that help took Jairus didn't need to know. *How* he would accomplish that help Jairus didn't need to know. What the end results would be Jairus didn't need to know. All that was necessary to calm his fears was the fact that God was coming to help. God, who is infinitely wise, infinitely loving and infinitely powerful. Those three attributes of God meant that whatever happened would be the best thing to care for all involved. Motivated by love, God knew the best end to this situation and being God, no end was outside of his power to accomplish.

This is what Jairus believed. That God would help. And whatever form that help took, it would be the best that God had for him. That was enough to quiet his fears before he even knew the outcome. And of course, the outcome was amazing. By the power of his own word, Jesus called the little girl back to life. Not alive and recovering and bedridden while she healed, but alive and restored to full strength. And God presented their daughter back to her grateful parents.

How many times throughout the Bible does this basic pattern of a story repeat itself? Someone is in trouble, someone needs help. They trust in God to help them, they call on him for help. And how does the story end every time? God helps. Sometimes in miraculous ways, sometimes in natural ways, sometimes in ways we couldn't have expected or ever saw coming. But over and over and over again the repeated message of Scripture is, "God keeps his promises." And that very same God who walked with Jairus to raise that little girl from the dead, that same God has promised you his help. And to that promise of help from *God* he adds, "Don't be afraid; just believe."

So why do we still fear and worry and doubt and despair? There are complicated answers to that question and there are simple answers. The shortest answer is a weakness of faith. But let's get a little more specific today. Our reading points us to particular part of this problem we can address, one of the biggest stumbling blocks to our peace in trusting God. It's the little word, "How?"

See, living in the New Testament era, we are a little spoiled for explanation. What I mean is, God has explained much to us, more than any before, and certainly we're grateful for that knowledge and we are blessed by it. But when it comes to areas he hasn't fully explained, where he asks us to operate on trust in him alone, then we can start to waver. Let me make that a little more concrete. Think back to where we started. To the questions, the fears, the doubts we all have that can keep us awake at night. How many of those are earthly concerns? I would guess pretty much all of them. Now how many of us lie awake wondering if God really will take us to heaven when we die? I would hope none of us, but realistically let's just say it's probably a lot less of us. Why? Why are we worried about here and now and not the eternal?

Does it have something to do with the fact that we know the "how" of our eternal salvation? That God has explained to us, in detail, exactly how he became one of us, walked as one of us and died in our place? That God has made it perfectly clear that his own sacrifice on the cross is exactly what we needed to clear our slates of guilt and bring us the holy life we need to stand in his presence? This is the cornerstone of our faith, it is the first and greatest truth and promise we come to trust from our God. And by and large, struggling to trust this truth doesn't usually cause us to lose sleep. When God tells us, "Don't be afraid; just believe," about this truth, that we are forgiven by the blood of Jesus, we sigh with comfort and we rest peacefully in his eternal care.

So why do we wrestle with his other promises? Why when God promises that he works all things for the good of those who love him do we struggle? Why when Jesus promises our Father will not give us stones for bread or says that he will clothe and feed us just as he does the birds and the lilies, why do we worry whether we will have enough? Why do we not embrace our troubles as discipline from a Father who only wants what's best for us? Why do we look at the world and despair when we are told that Jesus is in authority over it all? Why is it not enough that God has promised us his help and says, "Don't be afraid; just believe."?

Is it because we cling too strongly to what we can see and understand and explain? To put it more bluntly, is it because the "how" of our salvation is where we put our hope, not in the "who"? But the "how" is immaterial to us. God could have chosen not to tell us the specifics about Jesus and simply assure us that our sins are forgiven. That would be enough. That is what trust in God is. It is believing what he promises *without* the explanation of how, because we believe in the one who makes the promises.

Let's not sugarcoat anything here; doubt, worry, fear – they are all sin. They are all a failure to put your trust completely in God. But God's response to us in our fear is not to come and chastise us for our failure. His response is to come and build up our trust. He needs to, because every other influence in this world only ever tries to tear down that trust. God alone can strengthen that trust. And he can do so in so few words as, "Don't be afraid; just believe." Again, not because those words explain *how* he will help us, but because those words are spoken by the one powerful enough to raise a little girl from the dead and yet minutely loving enough that he cared whether she had food to eat afterward. The God who loves you enough that he died for you that you may live, that same God is also concerned about the minutia of your day to day life.

This is really where that idea of the "child-like faith" shows itself. The child does not know how his or her parent gets them food or clothing or the house they live in. But the child never doubts for a moment that there will always be breakfast when he wakes or clothes to wear for school that day. Once we grow and learn the details, then we start to learn where things can go wrong and we worry. But when it comes to the promises of God, they can't go wrong. Whatever it is, whatever is troubling you, whatever you're worried about, the same reply from our God covers them all. Don't be afraid; just believe. Take those words and put them wherever you worry. Hang them on the fridge. Stencil them on your dash. Add them to the background of your computer. Embroider them on your pillow. Take those words of Jesus with you everywhere, and when you see them, remember exactly who made you that promise. The one who is infinitely wise, infinitely powerful and infinitely loving. If that God tells you not to be afraid, if that God tells you to trust him, then there is never any reason to be afraid again. Amen.