

Series: **GREATER THAN...** June 3, 2007

GREATER THAN MY FEAR
Psalm 46, Mark 4:35-41, Judges 6-7

I. INTRO

- A. As you saw in this clip from ***Bowling For Columbine***, our culture is legendary in its ability to create fear. Blaise and I were talking about the service this morning, and she said, "If you watch TV (and, of course, no one here **does**, right) from 9 p.m. on, it's about **fear!** Barry Glassner, in this book, *Culture of Fear*, describes exactly what's going on. He has some fascinating statistics, in case you're interested in digging through it. -Glassner talks about a journalist by the name of Bob Garfield who tracked health articles from the ***Washington Post***, ***USA Today*** and the ***New York Times***—only those three publications—that kept telling us how sick we are. According to these experts, 59 million Americans have heart disease, 53 million suffer from migraines, 25 million from osteoporosis, 16 million from obesity, millions from cancer, 12 millions from serious disorders like brain injuries, etc. He totaled it all up—and 543 million American's were seriously ill, which is shocking in a country of 300 million people! Glassner concludes, "Either as a society we're doomed, or someone is seriously double-dipping!"
1. Some interesting facts. Did you know, for instance, that crime rates are actually **down** in North America? Why don't we hear that on the news? Well, it doesn't sell. It doesn't attract attention. Did you know that people are living healthier, longer lives than ever? And yet, people are more obsessed with and worried about their health than ever.
 - 2.. This **Time** magazine title caught my attention recently in Time magazine. **(SLIDE)** Notice the words: ***Be Worried! Be Very Worried!*** Now, I understand the serious issues surrounding global warming—and some of the steps we need to take to live responsibly. I do.
-But what does **worrying** about the problem accomplish? And yet that's the ongoing message we get. Be worried! Be terrified! Did you know that **[blank]**...name it...causes cancer? Did you know that your children are at risk? And what about when you get old—will you have to travel in someone's suitcase to visit your kids? Will you have enough insurance? What would you do? ***What would you do!?***
 3. Now, why do you think this is so prevalent? Why is it that one of the most common messages in mass media, particularly TV, is "Be afraid!" Be afraid of intruders—O-o-o look! Death, blood, pain! Hey, swimming suit season is coming! Imagine if you had to drive a **loser** car!
-Why? Fear motivates. Fear sells. Doesn't that make you **angry?** That someone is messing with your mind and emotions to **sell** you stuff? Who are the **real** terrorists?
- B. And there really don't have to be any facts for us to be afraid. And if we're not already afraid enough, we got out and watch Freddy Kruegger, or the ***Blair Witch Project*** or ***The Texas Chainsaw Massacre***.
Fear is this horrible sense inside that we're going to get hurt, be humiliated, or die—maybe all three. That things are way **way** out of control—with this unknown ending.

-Truth is--fear hits every one of us! It haunts us at night, steals our energy—and even drives us to react when we don't need to, or hurt others or do stupid things. And sometimes fear becomes the prison that keeps us from becoming the people we want to become, from doing the things we need and want to do—even from taking the action we **need** to take to be free.

1. There are some things you need to know about fear this morning. First, it doesn't just go away on its own. Most of the time you have to figure it out, find out if it's healthy—and then face it down. Sometimes it doesn't go away unless you chase it.
2. The second thing. Fear is a thief. Give it a little bit of space, and it will sink its claws into and just keep taking ground. And that's why it's not God's will that you and I live in fear—because fear is destructive.
3. Third, and this is the best; God is **way** greater than your fear. **Way** bigger. **Way** more powerful. **Very** worthy of your faith!

II. FEAR STUFF

- A. The thing about fear is that **everyone** experiences it. Everyone gets scared—even the Clint Eastwood's and Rambo's of the world. If a person never experiences fear, then something inside has been cauterized. The fear instinct is intended to produce adrenaline—which it does—and help us to super-alert and super-able to act. When you feel fear—and your heart is pounding and you either want to take someone's head off or run-run-run as fast as you can—that's adrenaline—the power drug--pumping through your system. It's normal.
 1. There is such a thing, though, as **healthy** fear and **unhealthy** fear. And it's important to know the difference. Good fear alerts us to danger. Bad fear paralyzes us and keeps us from the things we **need** to do.
 - Let's just do a short quiz and see if you know the difference.
 - *What about the fear you feel when you're rushing to get home from work—there's a blizzard, and the roads are covered with snow. Good fear or bad?
 - *You have a friend who's headed for disaster. You know you should say something, but you're afraid she'll blow up and reject your friendship. Good fear or bad?
 - *You have been feeling some pain in your chest, but you are hesitant to get it checked out because you can't stand hospitals or needles. Good fear or bad?
 - *What about the fear that keeps a man from expressing his truest and most authentic feelings to his wife who, as she's trying on bathing suits, asks "Do you think I need to lose weight?" Good fear or bad?
 2. This is my point. Should we sometimes be afraid? On high-alert to situations we find ourselves in? Yes...on a very short-term basis. But when fear gets into areas we can't control, when it engulfs our lives, when it grinds at us day after day—**NO!** That kind of fear doesn't come from God—and it's purely destructive—debilitating.
 - Why do you think Al Qaeda went to such great lengths to hijack planes and fly them into the twin towers and into the Pentagon? They know terrorism--fear of the unknown—works and can create political pressure that works in their favor.
- B. I can tell you this morning without any doubt that God doesn't want your life to be characterized by fear? Want to know **how** I know that? Two reasons. First, the most frequent command in the Bible is, "Do not fear; fear not; do not be afraid." It's true. This command is repeated **365 times**. One for every day in the year!

-Something else. The Bible makes it clear that God is incredibly loving, compassionate, kind and powerful. That **He** is in control of history--not aliens, disasters or Osama Bin Laden! And God is also He's massive enough to work in the tiniest details. **Nothing** escapes His notice!

-This God calls his people, His followers, to live with courage—and to **love**. And to have the freedom to love, you have to deal with fear. And you don't want to live in fear. The price is too high.

1. I want you to think for just a moment about the damage fear has done in our world. Think about the people who have wasted their lives—imprisoned by fear? Think about the damaged relationships that could've been saved by just **one** person willing to initiate a solution! Think about how the fear of not having enough has reinforced greed and kept people who have **plenty** from sharing with people who live on less than a dollar a day. Think of how many times **every single day** vulnerable people say yes to destructive things because they're afraid to stand up for what they really believe.
2. Think about how many people have never tried something they'd love to do—cause they're afraid they'd fail. Think of how many people have never even **checked** to see what their mission in life is—because they're afraid of the cost. Think of how often fear has caused people to lie rather than face the truth? How many government leaders chicken out on doing what's right because of fear! -I wonder how many people in our world have walked away from Jesus' incredible offer of forgiveness, hope, life and freedom—the **eternity** Jesus offers because they're afraid to believe, afraid of their friends, afraid of the price tag of being fully devoted to Jesus.
3. Listen to what the Bible says about what it calls a **spirit of fear and timidity: For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7 NLT)**.
-If God is not the source of this spirit of fear and timidity, who is? To some extent, we are. But the master of destructive fear is Satan. He knows that if he can make us afraid of the future. Afraid of not having enough, afraid of failure, afraid of disaster, afraid of what other people think—he's effectively stopped us from living a productive life. In fact fear is one of Satan' best tools!
-What would you rather have—a spirit of fear or a spirit of **power**? A spirit of **love**—no matter what it costs. And a spirit of **self-discipline**. A willingness to train yourself to do what you need to do when you need to do it. To move ahead in life—**even if you're afraid—and face it down!** I'd vote for power, love and self-discipline!

III. CASE STUDIES

- A. As I looked at fear—I realized that there are two general categories where I feel it. The first is a situation where I feel thrown off balance; where things are very much out of my control and I'm not sure of what the outcome will be. The other is where I know what I should do, what God wants me to do, what the right thing to do **is**—but I'm afraid to do it. -I want to illustrate these with two different stories taken directly from the Bible. The first is a story you're probably familiar with—a story from the narratives of Jesus. This story could be summarized with two things: a **life-jacket** and a **pillow**.
-In this story from Mark 4, Jesus has just finished an exhausting day of teaching and healing—and he's urged his disciples to go over to the other side of the lake. If you read ahead, you find out that the opposite shore is a dark place; a place where Jesus and his

disciples will face a demon-possessed man who's terrorized the people there for years. It was the pagan side of the lake, filled with pigs and Roman soldiers. So, that's where they're headed.

1. Well, they're out in the middle of the Sea of Galilee—when they hit what is called a **mega** storm. Anyone here ever been in a storm on a lake or at sea? I remember one time when Lori and I were out fishing with Neil and Lottie, an older couple we were friends with. We're in this little aluminum boat—when we suddenly see this storm coming across the lake. It was this wall of rain—with the wind actually blowing leaves and stuff across the surface. It was nasty—and **we** had a motor to get us to shore!

-When you're in a boat—there's no place to hide. Besides that—you can get seasick. One time I was deep sea fishing in really nasty weather. Typically, people who have been around water a lot—particularly commercial fishermen—don't get real uptight about weather. When they **do...?** Well, **then** it's time to be worried. Listen to how these commercial fishermen are feeling about the weather: **But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water. Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, "Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown (Mark 4:37-38 NLT)?"**

-In Matthew's account, this is called, in Greek, a **mega seismos**. Mega means...super size—big, big, big; **seismos** is the word we get **seismograph** from. Pretty clear, isn't it? And when the **pros** in the boat are screaming for help, you're in deep weeds!

2. There are situations in life that are **just** like this. You're paddling along through life; it's a calm, serene ride. Then you see a flash of lightening in the distance—and a low rumble. You get a phone call, a knock at the door, an email. And before you can reach what feels like a place of safety—the storm hits. One wave after another slams into your life, it's dark, you can't see the shore—and the Coast Guard ain't there!

-The thought the messes with your mind at a time like that is, "Jesus, **don't you care that I'm going down!**" Don't you care that my world has been turned upside down? Don't you care that my child is on drugs, and I'm **terrified?** Don't you care that we're 3 months behind in mortgage payments? Don't you care that I'm without a job...? Don't you care that I have to work—and raise these kids all by myself with no help? Don't you care? How come you're sleeping on a pillow when it's **life-preserver time?**

3. Let me read what happens:

When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Silence! Be still!" Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. Then he asked them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith (Mark 4:39-40 NLT)?"

-Now, I've been on lakes when the storm chills—but it takes **time** for the waves to flatten out! Not here. I love Jesus! He yells at the wind and waves like they're rowdy kids—and gives them a time out! And that's it. Bang! The lake is flat. Calm.

-Now, let me tell you what I would expect if I was in the boat. I know danger when I see it. They **were** in danger. I would expect Jesus to say, "Wow, sorry guys. Guess I dozed off there—didn't realize we were in such a pickle!" Jesus almost **never** does what we expect. And he doesn't here. The disciples reacted—it's a

life-jacket reaction. Jesus responds, **Why are you so afraid? Gee! Breathe into a paper bag! Why are you guys hyperventilating?**

4. When Jesus **instantly** settled this storm, He got another reaction: **The disciples were absolutely terrified. “Who is this man?” they asked each other. “Even the wind and waves obey him (Mark 4:41 NLT)!”**

-That’s a pretty good question, isn’t it? **Who IS this man?** They had been watching him for probably a year by this time. They’d watched him turn water to wine, touch people horribly disfigured by leprosy—and make them well, heal people who were blind, deaf, crippled. And maybe Jesus was asking, “You’ve watched all this stuff happen—you have a track record with me. Did you guys think I was just a good magician? Did you really think my life would end in a tragic boat accident at sea and that my mission would go down to the bottom of the lake—because I was doing pillow time?”

- a. Question. How many of you can look back and say that somewhere between 80-100% of what you’ve been afraid of or worried about up to this point has happened? You’ve burned down through a pile of adrenaline and Maalox and Pepto-Bismol and can say, “Yep! Being scared was the **right** thing to do?”

-How many of you have honestly had about 50% of your fears become reality? 20%?

- b. The point in the boat that night was one that sunk in gradually for the disciples. God was in the boat! God **made** the wind and sea. Listen to what Paul, an early leader, wrote:

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can’t see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.

Everything was created through him and for him (Colossians 1:15-16 NLT).

5. The question Christ-followers have had to ask themselves ever since that time is, “Is Jesus in my boat with me? Or am I all alone against the elements—dependent on whatever life-jackets I can scrounge up? How loud I can scream? Who’s **really** in charge of this storm I find myself in? Is it just Mother Nature—the forces out there? Does Jesus still calm storms?”

-I want to make something **very** clear. Jesus doesn’t usually make bad things go away when we pray. What He **does** is calm the storm of fear inside us and give us strength and wisdom and perseverance. He gives us courage and faith.

-That’s why God wants a personal relationship with you—He wants to be alive **inside** you where He can get at your fear valve—and shut it down. David, King of Israel, writer of Psalms, had lots and **lots** of reasons to be scared through his life. From a giant enemy warrior named Goliath, to an insanely jealous king out to skewer him, to a son who worked the crowds and tried to steal his kingdom. If you read the Psalms, you’ll find that he never once depended on his own charisma, wealth, or wisdom. Listen to what he says:

***I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety (Ps. 4:6 NLT).**

***When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me (Psalm 56:3-4 NLT)?**

6. Is there a lot to be afraid of in our world—in life? Yep! So, what do you do? This gets back to the core of what I talked about earlier—the command from God, “Don’t be afraid. Don’t fear.” Know *why* God tells us to know be afraid? ***For I am with you!*** In short, God is greater than my fear—whatever it is. He loves me, He controls everything, every storm—and what I need most is not a life-jacket—it’s a pillow—so I can rest and be at ***peace*** in him.
- How does that happen? Well, I find that whenever I start to hyperventilate about life—I have to go back to him. I went through an ***era of fear***—and it lasted well over a year—and I learned to pray—***breathe*** the Psalms every night, as I mentioned a few weeks ago. I still do that. And I’ve found that there is rest.
- My question for you is—is your God, your Savior big enough and loving enough to handle whatever problem you’re facing? The helplessness you feel? The fear of what the future will hold. Money, power, friends, and popularity—if that’s your god—can’t handle fear. But Jesus can! If He doesn’t seem big enough—then ***get to know Him better!***

- B. Of course, the other form of fear is being afraid to do what you need to do. There are times when we ***know*** the right thing to do—and we’re scared. Terrified. Sometimes God asks people do to things—and they’re afraid. There are ***so*** many stories in the Bible about circumstances just like that, it’s hard to choose just one. So, I thought I’d choose a story some of you may not be familiar with. Mainly because the star of this story is, by his own admission, a first class chicken. His name is Gideon. And he’s not the guy who goes around putting Bible’s in motel rooms.

-Gideon lived at a time in Israel’s history when life was absolutely miserable. People’s lives were slowly being swallowed up by groups of raiding people known as the Midianites and the Amalekites. Hordes of these terrorists would swarm a village—steal the crops, the animals—basically do whatever they wanted—and then take off. And the people were reduced to living in fear and in poverty—not knowing when the next raid would come.

1. We find Gideon threshing wheat in a wine press—partly because he hardly had enough grain to thresh, but mainly to hide from these people. If he’s not already scared enough—God shows up, apparently in human form. Listen to what happens:

The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, “Mighty hero, the Lord is with you (Judges 6:11 NLT)!”

-Think about that for a minute. It’s clear that this guy doesn’t have a brave bone in his body—and God says, “Hey, ***Mighty Hero!***” I’d think, “Gee, it’s bad enough that I’m quivering on the inside—but now ***God’s*** making fun of me!”

-Eventually, God tells Gideon what he wants him to do.

Then the Lord turned to him and said, “Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!” “But Lord,” Gideon replied, “how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!” The Lord said to him, “I will be with you. And you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man.” Gideon replied, “If you are truly going to help me, show me a sign to prove that it is really the Lord speaking to me. Don’t go away until I come back and bring my offering to you.”

-Interesting request: ***...Go with the strength you have and rescue Israel.*** Most people are afraid—and so is Gideon. ***“But I caa-a-an’t!*** I’m too weak! I can’t talk right! I’m the least of the least of the least; the coward of the cowardly. God, you

- have **no idea** how small and weak and scared I am!” God says, ***I will be with you! I’m sending you!*** I.e., I honestly don’t even **need** you to do that job—but I **will** use you! And when ***I’m*** done with you—you **will** be a mighty hero!”
2. You have to admit. What God is asking Gideon to do here is pure suicide. It’s not only dangerous, it’s **stupidly** dangerous—**IF** he’s going to do it in his own strength. So, there’s this patter. God asks. “Give me a sign.” God asks. “Give me a sign.” Initially, God touches the offering Gideon brings—and it incinerates on the spot. And **that** scares Gideon. “Oh no, I’ve met God face to face, now I’m **really** gonna die!” “Chill out, Gideon—I’m going to **use** you, not **kill** you!”
-You have to understand—God isn’t expecting that his people will be bungee-jumping, sky-diving, mountain-climbing, Pinto-driving adrenaline junkies. Fear is a very natural reaction to doing something where you’re uncertain of the outcome!
 3. Now, this story is actually quite long—but I want to net out what happens, because there are several really cool things that happen. The **first** thing God asks Gideon to do is confront the paganism in his own house and his own village. So, one night he gets an ox, tears down the altar to the pagan god, Baal, that his **Dad** had built—and chops up the Ashtorah pole, the symbol of Baal’s female consort. Then he sacrifices the bull and burns it up with the wood from the pole.
-Man, you can’t get much more confrontative than that! And the people are furious! They want his head. But Gideon’s Dad, surprisingly, admires his courage and makes this astounding statement, “If Baal is really god, don’t you think he can defend himself and kill my son, Gideon, if he’s so angry?” Good point!
 4. Here’s the point. When God wants us to do great things—scary things—some of the scariest are cleaning things up in our own home, our own friendships, the place where we work--before we go and try to export our faith somewhere else. God works through us there, sometimes to prove that He actually can be trusted--and that **we** can be more than a pile of quivering Jell-O!
-And this seems to be the defining moment Gideon needs. And just in time. The Midianites team up with a whole bunch of other nations and decide they’re just going to take Israel for themselves. So, they gather and encamp—and strategize—and this one valley in particular is **thick** with them. Listen to what happens:
Then the Spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon. He blew a ram’s horn as a call to arms, and the men of the clan of Abiezer came to him. He also sent messengers throughout Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, summoning their warriors, and all of them responded (Judges 6:34-35 NLT).
 5. I want you to notice something. It’s the **Spirit of God** who takes possession of Gideon and gives him the power and charisma to gather other people with him—and courage to actually take the first step toward the enemy. Now, he doesn’t do this without fear and trepidation. He asks God for more signs. Some of you will recognize the phrase, “laying out a fleece.” This is where it comes from. Gideon is scared, so he says, “Okay God. If you’re **really** gonna do this for us, I’m gonna lay this fleece out on the ground over night. Make the fleece wet—and the ground dry in the morning.” It happens. Well, that **could** be coincidence. “Okay. Make the **fleece** dry and the **ground** wet!” And God gives him the reassurance he needs to move forward. What Gideon **doesn’t** know is that God is **now** going to test **him!**
-Now. See if you’d lay money on Gideon to win. The narrative tells us that there are 135,000 enemy troops. Gideon has 32,000! About ¼ of what they have. God

speaks and says, “Gideon—you’ve got too many men! Tell the ones who are scared to go home!” **22,000** leave!

-God says, “Nah, still too many! When victory comes, they’ll just get big heads and think it all happened because they’re such tough warriors! God orders another troop reduction—based on how the troops drink water at a stream—and 9700 more go home. Gideon’s down to 300 men, and the fear starts to grip his heart. How can 300 men take on 135,000?

-So God says, in essence, “The battle’s yours! Walk toward it: **But if you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah. Listen to what the Midianites are saying, and you will be greatly encouraged. Then you will be eager to attack (Judges 7:10-11 NLT).**” And Gideon found out that fear works both ways. These enemy soldiers were **terrified**. It’s like God didn’t know what to do with all the fear He’d extracted from Gideon’s heart—so He injected it into theirs!

-Once Gideon heard **that**, he gathered his troops, and attacked at midnight—using a very unique strategy using jugs, torches and trumpets—and won. With 300 men. The war-cry was, **A sword for the Lord...and for Gideon!** And his people were freed from seven years of terror. And Gideon was the mighty hero God had told him he’d be. His courage is remembered today in every motel room in North America with his name on the Bible that’s been placed there.

- C. There’s one little insertion in this story that I had never seen before studying it this time around. It is, I believe, the key to facing fear of any kind. It’s right at the beginning of the story. **“It is all right,” the LORD replied. “Do not be afraid. You will not die.” And Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and named it Yahweh-Shalom (which means “the LORD is peace”) (Judges 6:23-24 NLT).**

-Literally translated, the first word from God’s mouth to Gideon is, **Shalom!** So often, that’s exactly what Jesus says through his ministry—especially after his resurrection. **Shalom! Peace!** Everything is under control. My peace I give to **you!** It’s all right! You’re not going to die!

-For the first time in the Bible, another of God’s name has been revealed. He’s revealed as “The All powerful One!” “The Lord of Armies!” “I Am that I Am!” “The God who sees **Everything!**” “The Lord who spreads the banner of victory on the mountains!” And now—Yahweh Shalom. The God of, “Do what I ask, **IT IS ALL RIGHT! I WILL BE THERE!**”

1. I wouldn’t be dumb enough to tell you this morning that following Jesus is a wonderful **safe** plan! Following Jesus is not necessarily safe—or easy. Sometimes it’s tough and gut-wrenching—but it’s the path to what he wants you to be, you **Mighty Warrior** you. No matter how chicken you feel. There are a lot of times when I sense that my heart is covered with this bumpy chicken skin. He calls me forward, and I’m clucking around in the barnyard. By the way, if you’ve had chicken recently, you know that the barnyard is not necessarily a safe place for chickens!
2. I know this from every story in the Bible about fearful people. If you cave to fear, you’re dead. I mean, not physically dead—but you **will** miss what God wants to do through you. You have **walk toward your fear**, but you need to do hand in hand with Yahweh Shalom—God our **Peace**. The One who is greater than your fear. He won’t shove you. He won’t kick you across the line. But He **does** give Himself—His Spirit. And, well, when **God** is with you...You know, the God who made everything... the God who works behind the scenes...the God who prepares

the way... what else do you really need? And he says to you and me, "I want to do amazing things through you. And it will sometimes be tough and scary. Will you *trust* me? **Will you TRUST me?**

IV. CLOSING THOUGHTS

- A. I'd be willing to bet that some of you are facing these two different kinds of fear. For some of you, it's a small boat in a big storm on a big ocean--a situation that feels WAY out of your control. The outcome seems unpredictable. The question I have is—is **Jesus** in your boat or not. Interesting, isn't it, that the word Jesus, Son of God had for the storm was **PEACE! BE STILL!** He offers shalom for storms—but especially for the hearts of those who are in them. He doesn't always stop them when we want—but if He's in your boat—my guess is that he hands out more pillows than life-preservers. He's the life preserver!
- B. And some of you are facing a situation that is really scary. For you, it's a Maalox moment. It's this moment like the one in the movie, **A Few Good Men**, you know, where Jack Nicholson yells, **You can't HANDLE the truth!** You don't want the truth—you want to run and hide! You've got to face the truth about yourself, the truth about your home, the truth about your marriage—or the truth about something important God is calling you to do. And you've got to walk toward your fear.
- I've found—as have **millions** of people who have felt this awful fear inside—that if you run, fear will chase you. When you stop, turn, and face it down—Yahweh Shalom shows up—and it's absolutely **amazing** what happens! So. Will you. Right now. Will you put your trust in Him and not in you!