

The Overlooked Commands of Jesus

#1 Fear Not

Acts 15; Matthew 8, 10, 14

Introduction: I'm interested in stories about why people aren't Christians and even more so about why people abandon the Christian faith. And the one thing that you find about those who abandoned the faith is that they stopped being Christians for very bad reasons. They bailed out because they met some quirky or weird Christian, or they didn't like some church or the preacher, so they bail out on Jesus.

Another interesting reason people give up on Christianity is because of the bible. They find something they don't agree, don't like, or are against and they give up on Christianity.

I was in a store a few days before Easter and these two ladies were talking and one asked the other, "do you know a good hairdresser?" And then she related how upset she was because her stylist messed up.

We've all had bad haircuts, so you found another barber or stylist, right. If you've had a bad medical experience, don't you get a second opinion or find another doctor or clinic. We've all had bad experiences at restaurants, hotels, vacations. I don't think any of us ever give up on haircuts, doctors, eating out or vacationing. Meeting a bad Christian is not a good reason to abandon Jesus.

Here's what I know: following Jesus makes your life better and makes you better at life; and I think everyone wants that – a better life and being better at life. Jesus describes that as abundant life.

There was a historian by the name of Tertullian, a centurion's son. He became a Christian when he was 40 years old. And he made a statement during the time it was dangerous to be a Christian. He said, *"If the Tiber rises too high or the Nile too low, the remedy is always feeding Christians to the lions."*

His point was that in the Roman Empire, anytime something went bad they blamed the Christians. But nobody gave up on Christianity because of

persecution. Nobody gave up on Christianity because they couldn't understand the OT or make the texts line up.

Those early believers who turned the world upside down believed in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and they were filled with His Holy Spirit.

Illustration: Karen Armstrong has written a book, "Fields of Blood; Religion and the History of Violence." When she gets to the part about the rise of Christianity, she agrees with what many historians believe and she says, **"against all odds, by the third century Christianity had become a force to be reckoned with. We still do not know how this really came about."**

Historians look for natural causes as to how this could be. They knew it all started with Jesus and His teachings, and miracles, but how could it survive and thrive like it did.

For instance, there is no mystery about America, you have the colonists and King George, taxation without representation, the Boston Tea Party, Revolutionary War.

But when it comes to Christianity there is no natural explanation. It's supernatural. And fortunately for us, the people who were there after Jesus rose from the dead, tell us what happened.

We know that Jesus rose from the dead and nobody saw it coming. It was a total surprise and people who were afraid before, are now walking in the streets saying, "I serve a risen savior, He's in the world today... I know that He is living, no matter what men may say."

And thousands of people embraced Jesus as the risen Lord. At the same time there was a group of Jewish historians who realized that they missed it, so they dive back into the OT and find him everywhere.

That's why when you read the gospel of Matthew; he makes references to how Jesus is the fulfillment of OT prophecy about the Messiah.

Other disciples made it a priority to tell the Gentiles that Jesus has come to save them as well. Christianity had been introduced to them as something

brand new that God had done in the world. Not one Gentile became a follower of Jesus because someone showed them a book and said, here is what the bible says, because there was no NT.

All the Gentiles in the first century had were: the teachings of Jesus and the eyewitness accounts of those who saw Jesus. That's why Paul said to the Gentile believers in Corinth...

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

3For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. 6After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8and last of all he appeared to me also.” (1 Cor. 15:1-8; NIV)

That was all the gospel they had. An Almighty God has approached them as a loving Heavenly Father, desiring a relationship with them through Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile back in Jerusalem, the leaders who had gotten saved wanted to keep these new believers hitched up to the Jewish religion. This causes some problems and leads to one of the first church business meetings. You can find it in Acts 15. **And the only item on the agenda is: Do we have to become Jewish to be Jesus followers?**

The Council at Jerusalem

1Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Let's stop right here. Can you imagine what this would have done to a Billy Graham Crusade. Not a whole lot of guys would be walking to the altar during “Just as I am.”

Or imagine your teenager gets saved on the last night of summer camp and calls home and says, “I just gave my heart to Jesus, and they want to know who our health care provider is.”

2This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So, Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question...The question being, do we have to become Jewish to be Jesus followers?

4When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. **5**Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.” [some Pharisees had become believers; they love Jesus but they’re still devoted to the Law]

6The apostles and elders met to consider this question. **7**After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe.

8God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. **9**He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.

10Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? **11**No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

12The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. **13**When they finished; James spoke up. “Brothers,” he said, “listen to me. **14**Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles.

15The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:
16“ ‘After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it, 17that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the
Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things’ — 18things
known from long ago.

And then verse 19. This needs to be our personal vision statement: “It is my
judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who
are turning to God. **It’s not supposed to be difficult to come to Christ.**

20Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted
by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from
blood. 21For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the
earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”

And so, the Council sent a Letter to Gentile Believers saying,

**28It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with
anything beyond the following requirements:** So, from the Ten
Commandments and some other 600 commandments in the OT, James is
getting ready to tell us what we’re responsible for. Are you ready for this?

**29You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat
of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid
these things.**

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these things. FAREWELL.**

Now the reason he included these dietary laws was because in many of these
cities, if the Gentiles were not sensitive to Jewish believer’s beliefs, they would
have a hard time coming together in the name of Jesus. Watch what you eat
and abstain from sexual immorality. That’s it.

During that council the Christian faith was unhitched from Judaism.

Paul hadn't started writing letters yet. New Testament hadn't been put together yet. They had the Good News, Jesus' teaching, eyewitness accounts, and these instructions from the Counsel in Jerusalem to live the Christian life.

Jesus had given them focus by saying, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and love others as I have loved you." Jesus had also given some other commandments that were impossible for them to keep.

And so, with this background I want to begin a series today on the Overlooked Commands of Jesus.

These commands when combined with loving God and loving others; turned the world upside down. They are the basis for the supernatural causes that made Christianity a force to be reckoned with by the Third Century.

What would it be like to be a Jesus follower in the First Century, when all they had was the fact that Jesus rose from the dead, He sent the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they had Jesus' teachings as spoken by the eyewitnesses, and these instructions from the Jewish council?

The overlooked commands were commands that Jesus told His followers **not** to do. These commands were unrealistic, and none of His followers took them seriously, until after His resurrection. And when He rose from the dead, everything changed. There are four of them that we'll look at.

The first overlooked command is **fear not**. In other words, **don't be afraid**.

Fear is a spirit that sometimes expresses itself through sweaty palms. In a moment it can tie your stomach into knots. It can cause your blood pressure to rise and your courage to drop like a rock.

If the shock it brings is strong enough, the blood can be cut off almost completely from the brain momentarily, causing a person to faint. In other cases, it can cause the blood flow to the extremities of the body to be hindered so that a person actually gets "cold feet."

Medical science has even proven that it can cause the cardiovascular muscles to react in such a way that heart failure is the result, meaning that people can

literally be "scared to death."

This is the way fear works. First it begins to dominate the thought. And when it dominates the thought then it dominates the action because the action is simply the result of the thought. It is at this point that fear becomes a phobia and begins to dominate every aspect of our lives.

The Greek word for fear is "phobos." Psychiatrists and doctors have identified over 700 different kinds of phobias. Claustrophobia is a fear of enclosed places. Ergophobia is a fear of work. Demophobia is a fear of crowds. Some churchgoers have "plateaphobia" (the fear of offering plates.) There is even phobophobia, which is a fear of fear!

Fear is a force that can dominate anyone. Do not get the idea that weak people are just affected by fear. Howard Hughes, who was the wealthiest man in the world when he was alive, was so afraid of germs that he used four boxes of Kleenex every day, wiping off everything he touched. Evil Knievel, the daredevil stunt rider was afraid of airplanes.

Joseph Stalin was so afraid of being poisoned or murdered that he had eight bedrooms which could be locked up, and no one would ever know from one night to the next in which of these bedrooms he would sleep.

It was said that Julius Caesar remarked that the shouts of his enemies were music to his ears, but he suffered from brontophobia - a fear of thunder.

In Matthew 10 Jesus gets His followers together and He says, "I'm going to send you out as sheep among wolves; and he warns them about all the bad things that will happen...but he says, in Matthew 10:28, ***"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."*** (NIV)

And then he gives an illustration in vs. 29-31; ***"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care." And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."*** (NIV)

Okay, so wait a minute Jesus, you told us to go spread the good news of the kingdom and that we might be arrested and beaten, but not to be afraid?

The disciples did go out so apparently this message was getting through and perhaps because there was an incident that happened two chapters before in Matthew 8.

Jesus has been teaching and ministering and He's surrounded by a huge crowd and it's time to get away. Matthew 8:23-27, ***"Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping."***

[Here's why this is important. Some of those that have left the faith or some of you struggling right now believed that in your tragedy, Jesus was asleep. He did not respond the way that you thought he should. Now get this, the people that Jesus hung out with experienced the very same thing that you might be feeling or might have felt when life was falling apart around you.]

The story goes on... "The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" [They're like Jesus, we're in a furious storm and the waves are sweeping over the boat; this shouldn't happen because you're here in the boat with us]

He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" (NIV)

In Mark versions of this story, who probably got his info from Peter; he takes the noun and verb form in the Greek and says that after Jesus calmed the storm; **the disciples Feared a Great Fear.**

In other words, they were afraid they were going to drown, but they were ***really afraid*** after they realized they weren't going to drown. They were afraid of the storm, but after Jesus calmed the storm, they were more afraid of Him.

So, connections are being made...don't fear the person, don't fear the thing that can kill the body...don't fear the storm...don't fear the disease...instead fear the One who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Time goes by and a few chapters later in Matthew 14 Jesus uses the disciples and miraculously feeds five thousand men, plus women and children; and in verse 22 it says, ***"Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat."***

[Can you think of any reason Jesus made the disciples get into the boat? It's because they can remember the last time they got in a boat with Jesus, and it didn't go so well.] ...and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd."

[So now it's most likely the same people in the same boat, on the same sea, but no Jesus. So now they're crossing the sea and vs. 23 says],

"After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, 24 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it."

They were out there all night, and it goes on to say. 25 Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. 27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

So before Jesus was with them and they were afraid and now Jesus wasn't with them and they were still afraid. Jesus is reminding them that the time will come when He won't be with them, but He will be watching them.

ILLUSTRATION: John Ortberg writes in his book, If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat: "What would you guess is the most common command in Scripture? "It is not for us to be more loving or to have more humility or good works..."The command in Scripture that occurs more often than any other is: **"Fear not.** Do not be afraid. Be strong and courageous.

As human beings, we tend to be fearful people. I mean, non-Christians and Christian alike, we deal with fear. Nobody has to introduce you to fear. It's just something that we all have experienced.

STORY: I once read the story of a man who was hitch hiking on a very dark night in the middle of a blinding storm. The storm was fierce and hardly any cars were on the road, but finally, he saw a car coming towards him and stop. Without further thought, he got in the back seat and the car began to slowly make its way down the road. But when he looked up front to thank the person... he realized THERE WAS NOBODY behind the wheel.

Just then the car was headed for a curve and a hand appeared through the window and slowly turned the steering wheel. He closed his eyes and began to pray... and when he opened his eyes again, he saw that the car was coming out another curve. Again, a hand appeared and steered the car around the curve.

Filled with fear, he leaped from the car and ran for his life. Before long he saw a diner alongside the road and shaking from the cold and from his fear, he ordered a hot cup of coffee. As he drank his coffee, he told anyone who'd listen about his frightening experience.

About half an hour later, two guys walk into the same diner... and one says to the other, "Hey Bob, isn't that the guy who jumped into the car when we were pushing it down the road?"

“Lloyd Ogilvie notes there are 366 ‘fear not’ verses in the Bible-one for every day of the year, including one for leap year!”

So, let's make this personal. This is Jesus' response to our fear. I don't have to be afraid even when there is something to be afraid of.

Here's a Key Take-Away today: “You don't need to be afraid even when there is something to be afraid of.”

Here's the rest of the story. The disciples did not learn this lesson, even up till the end. Jesus is arrested and they run away in fear. They didn't show up for his funeral. They were hiding for their lives. Despite all the teaching and the

miracles, in the end they were still afraid. But when we find them in the book of Acts they were now fearless. What happened?

The thing that made all the difference in the world was not another lesson, it wasn't another boat ride; it was that once they saw the resurrected Jesus, they became fearless. **The ultimate enemy – death had been defeated and when they lost their fear of death, they feared not.**

Seeing a resurrected savior changed everything. Here's what the early Christians understood, and we better understand. When you stake your life on the fact that Jesus *really* died for your sins, was buried, and rose from the dead to offer us resurrection life; you will fear not.

You will not fear the person, place, sickness, disease, or anything that can destroy the body. You will only fear the One who can destroy both soul and body. "Fearing not" becomes a way of life.

In the late 2nd Century Marcus Aralias was the emperor of Rome. He oversaw what was considered the fourth major persecution of Christians. This is 165 to 185 AD. During that time there was a famous medical writer named Claudius Galenus. And he wrote a lot of things that have been preserved through antiquity. And several times in his writings, he mentions Christians.

Now something you should know, back in those days it was illegal to examine a dead body. So, what the doctors would do is hang around the arenas and places where people were dying, because they could examine dying bodies. Claudius examined the body of many tortured and dying Christians. Here's what he wrote, ***"for fearlessness of death and the hereafter is something we witness in them every day."***

It was the fearlessness of Christians in the face of death that got people's attention because everyone is afraid of death; except those who believe in a risen savior.

Fear is more than just an emotional response. Fear is spirit that whispers, "God is not big enough to help you...Jesus is asleep."

Remember Job. Job 3:25-26, *"The thing that I fear has come upon me..."*

Jesus declared that in the last days "men's hearts will fail them for fear..."
(Luke 21:26)

The Apostle Paul comes along later and gives us this great verse in 2 Timothy 1:7. I love it in the KJV ***"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."***

A sound mind is a mind that is "free from fear." A mind tormented with fearful thoughts is anything but sound. Fear enters our mind as a seed (thought), it sprouts, takes root and begins to grow. When we act on that thought or acknowledge it, the fear becomes a stronghold. The Bible warns us to cast down every thought that exalts itself above the knowledge of God's Word.

God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and love, and a ***restored mind.***

God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and love, and a ***redeemed mind.***

God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and love, and a ***renewed mind.***

We not only have the power to fight fear but the love of God to face fear.
"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love." (1 John 4:18)

Let me quickly share with you three practical ways to overcome this overlooked command to "FEAR NOT."

First, admit your fear. When David had been captured one time by the Philistines, he said, ***"Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you."*** (Psalm 56:3)
Pretending you are not afraid will not solve the problem. Never be ashamed to admit your fear...

Secondly, activate your faith. God's answer to fear is faith. Above the mantle of a famous hotel in England stands this inscription: ***"Fear knocked at the door. Faith answered. No one was there."***

You can't believe God's Word and be fearful at the same time.

Fear imprisons, faith liberates.

Fear paralyzes, faith empowers.

Fear disheartens, faith encourages.

Fear sickens, faith heals.

Fear will connect you to whatever it is you're afraid of, just as faith will connect you to God's promises.

Finally, acknowledge your Heavenly Father. Isaiah said, "***Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid.***" (Isaiah 12:2, NIV) The great preacher C.H. Spurgeon, said, "The past you need not fear for it is forgiven you, the present you need not fear; it is provided for, the future you need not fear; it is secured by the living power of Jesus."

What you are afraid of is directly related to your lack of faith in God's Word or what you don't believe to be true. Fear is designed to create doubt and doubt destroys faith and trust. Isaiah 26:3 (NIV) ***You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.***

Do you know why Jesus can tell us to you ***fear not***? Because He's on the very same boat, you're on?; because He can not only swim, but He can also walk on water? ***Not really!*** It's because He has conquered death, hell, and the grave, and says to us you don't have to be afraid even when there is something to be afraid of because Jesus is with you 'til the end of the age. **Fear Not!**