

08

Sheepish

WHAT'S THE SAME | BACK TO THE FUTURE

What a special week this is.

This is the first week we struggle to find similarities between our two mirror verses. Matthew has no similar verse to Luke's, instead it has "an entirely different ending to the section."¹ We will get to that in the "What's Different" section. So get pumped.



But first, what remains the same is fear over the future.

So far we've been told not to worry about our worth, our clothes, our bodies, our food, our finances, our time, and our work. One commentator said it very clearly, "We already know not to worry about our basic needs of today, now we are specifically challenged not to worry about our needs of tomorrow."²

Jesus is leaving no rock unturned in uprooting worry and anxiety from our lives. Even our future lives.

The Greek word Jesus uses for fear, *phobeō*, is where we get the term phobia.

It is something that shapes our worldview. The interesting thing about fear is that it isn't something we worry about. Fear is bigger than worry; it is a form of identity.

Those who follow Christ have a future that is promised to be bright. We know how the story ends. Jesus wins. So we have no reason to fear the future.

But notice, Jesus doesn't say we can't be deeply troubled. He was (Matthew 26:37). He doesn't say we can't be in pain. He was (Luke 23:33). He doesn't say we can't be sad. He was (John 11:35). But we can not be people who fear the future, because God says we will be too busy laughing at it: "Strength and honor are her clothing, and she can laugh at the days to come" (Proverbs 31:25).

STRENGTH AND HONOR ARE HER CLOTHING, AND SHE CAN LAUGH AT THE DAYS TO COME.

Fear of the future is a shoddy frock when compared to strength and honor. It is an outfit that makes us nervous, uncertain, confused, and scared. So he follows up his command with giving the disciples a new identity, "little flock".

"Little flock" is a term of endearment. Jesus called his disciples little sheep because he knew they were vulnerable and exposed. He knows we buckle and spaz out and can't hold it together too. And that is why we are reminded that it is the Father's pleasure to give us the kingdom.

It is God's delight to walk with his little flock of spazzes—day in and day out.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT | TOMORROW

Jesus doesn't even bother with fear in Matthew's account, he goes straight to the root of fear: tomorrow. The reality is that something might go wrong tomorrow. Someone might get hurt. You might lose your job. You might forget something really important. You might feel incredibly lonely.

Jesus knows what's coming next for you. You don't.

This creates one of two outcomes: a life tortured by the fear of what may go wrong and all energy going towards minimizing those possibilities. Or a life abundantly reliant upon the God who says he is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

Small and helpless doesn't scare God. Instead, he is pleased when we accept our limitations as an invitation to rely on him.

If you struggle with fear, he is itching to tell a courageous story through you. The Bible tells us that God's eyes are always on the lookout for his kids who need to be strengthened. "For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him."³ In Hebrew, the word "range" is sometimes translated "to run to and fro" and is defined "to wander about at a fast pace."⁴

God isn't just peeking over his favorite book or pulling out an earbud from his favorite podcast to look in on us from time to time. God is actively looking and searching for those who are desperately looking and searching for him. He is eagerly and excitedly jogging back and forth, studying our hearts. He is waiting to strengthen us, outfit us for battle, and send us into the world as bold ambassadors of purpose and hope.

It is one of the richest truths you will ever come to claim.

HE IS WAITING TO STRENGTHEN US. But what's frustrating about Matthew's take on the way to deal with the fear of the future is that there is no reassurance that tomorrow is going to go well. He simply says, "Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." Tomorrow is a bit of a trouble maker. But trying to control tomorrow is one of the biggest blankets of wool we pull over our own eyes, so it's no wonder we feel a bit sheepish.

We cannot lock tomorrow in a vault. We can only lock our eyes on the One who says we have no reason to fear the future. And believe him.

WHAT THAT MEANS | THE BOX

Whenever I tell my earthly dad that I will see him tomorrow, he always responds, "God willing." It always strikes me as a particularly Eeyore thing to say. But turns out, my dad is just being Biblical.

"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit, yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.'"⁵

Imagine that Jesus is presenting us with a box. That box is filled with one thing: *tomorrow*.

The dimensions of the box never change. We don't ever get a bigger one, a smaller one, or are free from one. It is the dimensions of our reality.

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When we choose to fight the box, we only tear holes in it and wear ourselves out with fear. The holes we make in the box infiltrate our space with slices of frightening scenarios happening all around us. We think we can see the whole picture, but we are only seeing in part.

When we choose to stay within the box, thankful for its protection from what we cannot see, gratitude fills our mouths. When we trust God's will from inside the parameters of what God has chosen to reveal to us, something incredible happens: we are no longer scared of what we cannot see.

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CANNOT SEE.**

At the very end of all of our tomorrows, we get eternity. We get to embark on the Great Adventure that we've spent our entire lives underestimating and even fearing. We are turned inside out and all the things that went rogue at the crosswaters of chaos and sin, become calm streams in the hand of a living God.

We get to see the places that have been prepared for us. We get to fall into the arms of the one who outfitted us for the battle of every troubled tomorrow. We get to weep at the wonder of a world free from worry. We get to take a deep breath and for the first time breathe in air that hasn't been polluted by sin. We get to leave the box life that needs God's protection to survive, and be introduced to a world where God's protection becomes endless play.

We get to feel fear melt away like a bad dream and see with our own eyes "what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined." We get to step into a reality where an unveiling of what God has been up to on our behalf unfolds. And we get to be knocked down by the unadulterated audacity of his lovingkindness.

Jesus says, do not be anxious for tomorrow because eternity is going to kick some serious *ass*umptions.



DISCUSS

What is your greatest fear?

Is it comforting to know that God is always on the lookout for the kids whose hearts are fully committed to him?

Can you recognize areas of your life where you continually try to control tomorrow for fear of the future?

How do you interact with the box of time that God has given you? Do you identify more with fighting its limitation or accepting it as protection?

Do you look forward to eternity or does it scare you?

What do you hope heaven will be like?



READ & REFLECT

Read Isaiah 54:10-14.

When fear talks it says things like, “my world is ending” and “everything is falling down around me.” Similar language is used in verse 10. What does God say will never be taken away from you, even in the worst case scenario?

In verse 11, list all of the precious jewels and stones that God says he is building your foundation with:

Human foundations are usually built of plain concrete, but God uses precious materials for our eternal foundation. What does this tell you about how God deals with his “afflicted, storm-tossed, and not-comforted” kids?

What are we “established by” in verse 14? What will be far from you and not come near you?

PEACE PRACTICE | PICK A PHOBIA

We all have phobias of some kind. This week, pray diligently for God to replace whatever that fear is with a refilling of faith in a God who tells us not to fear. He is in the business of making all things new, and even deep rooted areas of anxiety are not off limits to his restorative nature. Come next week ready to share how that went.

First Look

Luke 12:33

Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.

Second Look

Matthew 6:19-20

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.