

Sermons on Matthew

The Sleeping Savior

Matthew 8:23-27

With Study Questions

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Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. ⁻²⁴⁻
_And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. ⁻²⁵⁻ Then His disciples came to *Him* and awoke Him, saying, “_Lord, save us! We are perishing!_” ⁻²⁶⁻ But He said to them, “_Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?_” Then __He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. ⁻²⁷⁻ So the men marveled, saying, “_Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?_” - (Matthew 8:23-27).

Preface

In chapters eight through ten of Matthew we read of various miracles Jesus performs. These miracles show that He is the long awaited Messiah (Matthew 11:2-6); they affirm that He speaks the word of God (Matthew 9:6); they reveal His love and compassion (Mark 1:41); they also demonstrate His power over sickness, death, the elements and the devil (Matthew 8-10).

I. The Storm

Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. ⁻²⁴⁻
And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. -(Matthew 8:23, 24)?

This tempest (*seismos*, where we get our word seismic relating to earthquakes), was overwhelming. The boat was filling with water and these experienced men of the sea were afraid for their lives. Their nautical expertise had reached its end. The power of sickness, the power of the devil and the power of the elements are insurmountable foes for mere men, even the most skilled men. As we have observed in the recent tsunami, water can be quite deadly and people do not have an unwarranted fear of it.

A Sleeping Savior

Jesus, unlike the disciples, was fast asleep. He had worked hard all day and had the perfect peace of His Father. Here we have

the Savior of the world sleeping on a boat. Jesus, true to our experience, gives the appearance of being uninvolved. In Mark it recorded that the disciples said, **“Teacher, __do You not care that we are perishing” (Mark 4:38)?**

Have you not been tempted to ask that question during the storms of your life? I am not morphing this storm into a mere metaphor. To these disciples, this literal storm was a storm of life. Where should our minds take us when we consider Christ’s interaction (or apparent lack thereof) in the plagues by which we are encompassed?

It was and is not uncommon for the disciples of Christ to see His arms to be short. Those in the boat with Jesus had not learned of the fullness of Christ. Little doubt they viewed Him as the powerful man of God. But now that man was asleep and they were in dire straits. They failed to realize that Jesus, the man slept, but Jesus, the living God, never slumbers

I _will lift up my eyes to the hills— From whence comes my help? ²□My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth. ³□He will not allow your foot to __be moved; _He who keeps you will not slumber. ⁴□Behold, He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep (Psalm 121:1-4).

Let us never mistake God’s apparent idleness to be genuine inactivity on His part. His actions, be they blessings and curses are sure. God is not unacquainted or indifferent to your storm. He is not slumbering. But the blessings and curses are not the sum of it. Jesus was not merely going to use a happenstance storm in a pedagogical manner. It is much more than that—as we shall soon see.

A Storm of Instruction

Prior to calming the storm Jesus mildly chastises His followers. **“Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?”** One might suggest that the situation be resolved prior to the lecture. If I am hanging from a cliff, please pull me up then warn me to stay away from the edge. But it was not as if Jesus was going to lose control of the situation. And we are often most malleable amidst life’s tempests.

I am quite afraid of heights. I don't like flying. Once I parachuted. There was about six hours of instruction prior to the jump. From elementary school to my Master's degree, I have never been more attentive to instruction in my life.

It makes me wonder if the disciples were learning two lessons: the lesson of courage as it relates to faith; but also the lesson of the power and judgments of Christ. 'This storm,' they may have thought (and we certainly should surmise), 'is merely an object lesson in the hands of the Master.' Would God do such a thing? Create a storm merely to instruct?

**Those who go down to the sea in ships, Who do
business on great waters, ²⁴ They see the works of the
Lord, And His wonders in the deep. ²⁵ For He
commands and __raises the stormy wind, Which lifts up
the waves of the sea. ²⁶ They mount up to the heavens,
They go down again to the depths; _Their soul melts
because of trouble. ²⁷ They reel to and fro, and stagger
like a drunken man, And __are at their wits' end.
²⁸ Then they cry out to the Lord in their trouble, And He
brings them out of their distresses. ²⁹ He calms the
storm, So that its waves are still. ³⁰ Then they are glad
because they are quiet; So He guides them to their
desired haven. ³¹ Oh, that *men* would give thanks to the
Lord *for* His goodness, And *for* His wonderful works to
the children of men! ³² Let them exalt Him also __in the
assembly of the people, And praise Him in the company
of the elders (Psalm 107:23-32).**

What had perhaps escaped their attention—what perhaps escapes the attention of many—is that Jesus is not merely the calmer of storms, He is the raiser of storms. Popular yet unbiblical is the notion that God is not the ultimate and first cause of our troubles—even employing Satan for His own desired ends (John 13:27). All of creation is His classroom and His children are His beloved students. Hence fear is always mixed with a want of faith.

Fear and Faith

“Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?” Is fear always an act of faithlessness? Not necessarily. I want my children to have a healthy fear of the ocean or the freeway or a passing Doberman. I believe Jesus speaks here of the immoderate dread which accompanies those who view their conditions as the kind of random tragedy which produces a hopeless despair.

This immoderate dread is the natural child of a vapid Christianity which seeks to jettison God from His rightful place as the one who **“works out all things after the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11)**. These disciples must be prepared to face death and to face it in faithful nobility for this would be their lot—it is where the lines fall for us all. Christ prepares His children for death.

We forget that cowardice is a sin (Revelation 21:8). Through the subtle treachery of the evil one, courage has become antiquated. Instead of men being the protector of the house and nation, they have, through feminist influence, become an extension of the wife. We would be made to believe that women hold with scorn the macho man with his undue levels of testosterone. Warriors, they would have us believe, are dinosaurs, and valor is telling of an unhealthy upbringing. Heaven help us.

Faith in the power of Christ ought to produce courage. And I must argue that it is akin to insanity to be courageous in the face of death apart from a saving knowledge of Him who holds the keys to death, hell and the grave (Revelation 1:18).

The Building up of our faith is one of the great blessings conveyed to us by the Savior. That faith, and the courage that it produces, yields a sure hope. Knowing this, the Apostle Paul can write,

**And not only *that*, but __we also glory in tribulations,
__knowing that tribulation produces __perseverance; ⁻⁴⁻
__and perseverance, __character; and character, hope. ⁻⁵⁻
__Now hope does not disappoint, __because the love of
God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy
Spirit who was given to us (Romans 5:3-5).**

Perhaps you grow weary of the storm. Take heed student...you grow weary of Master’s instruction. The lesson is not over. And though certain tempests come and go, the lesson will not be over this side of glory. We all face the tempest of our last breath.

May God, by His grace, produce the type of courage in us that we would beckon our loved ones to watch us die the way a Christian ought to die—with peace, confidence, courage and assurance of the Christ who never sleeps. Two last points:

Mega Calm

When Jesus calms the storm it is calm indeed. The Greek work reveals it to be a mega-calm. There are few things which make the world seem more right than a calm sea.

_You who still the noise of the seas, The noise of their waves, _And the tumult of the peoples (Psalm 65:7).

Contemplate the disciples surveying the calmness of the sea and how their thoughts would turn from their fear of the storm to the tranquility of the waters to the person of Christ. Mark records their reaction. Though they feared the storm, Christ...

...they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, “_Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him (Mark 4:41)!_”

It would seem that it was here that the disciples truly began to grasp the lesson.

The __fear of the Lord *is* the beginning of wisdom, **And the knowledge of the Holy One *is* understanding (Proverbs 9:10).**

If one is in fear of the storm, how much more should they fear the one to whom the storm must submit.

Let us learn from the disciple's lesson. Let us not think the arm of the Lord too short.

Is My hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? Indeed with My __rebuke I dry up the sea (Isaiah 50:2)

And if I, as a dying man, am preaching to dying men, fret not at death itself for our Savior is the conqueror of death and in Him we are more than conquerors. For those who trust in the Savior who never sleeps, death, and its attending squalls are defeated enemies that deserved to be mocked. Let us take joy in our lives, whether in peace or storm. Let us not grant them the sting that has been removed by Christ.

Oh, that *men* would give thanks to the Lord *for* His goodness, And *for* His wonderful works to the children of men! ³² Let them exalt Him also __in the assembly of the people, And praise Him in the company of the elders (Psalm 107:31-32).

Questions for Study

1. Why does Jesus perform miracles (page 2)?
2. Over what does Jesus have power (page 2)
3. Was Jesus awake or asleep on the boat (page 3)?
4. How should we respond when it appears that Jesus is uninvolved in our trials (page 3)?

5. Did Jesus merely use a happenstance storm to give a lesson? Explain (page 5).
6. Is all fear wrong (page 5)?
7. How is fear related to faith (pages 5, 6)?
8. Is cowardice sin (page 5)?
9. How should we respond to storms (page 6)?
10. How did the disciples view Jesus after He calmed (page 7)?