



Lesson 2 June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021

## Why Are You Afraid?

Study Scripture – Matthew 8:23-27

Background Scripture – Psalm 107:24-25, 28-29; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25

### Key Verse:

*He said to them, Why are you afraid, you men of little faith? Then He got up, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and it became perfectly calm.*

**Matthew 8:26**

### INTRODUCTION

Fear, as a God-given self-defense mechanism, can trigger a reaction of *fight, flight, or freeze*. The problem is that the particular reaction that results may be irrationally inappropriate or even harmful in a given context. At lower levels, chronic fear can ruin appetite, raise blood pressure and cause ulcers. Fear itself can kill.

One of the best-known stories in the Gospels is that of Jesus' calming the storm on the Lake. Just from a simple reading of the few verses we would rightly conclude that the account demonstrates Jesus' authority over the elements of nature and the disciples' 'weak faith' for being afraid. The story is included in a series of reports about Jesus' authority in various areas, sickness, demons, death and sin. It provides another significant part to the portrayal of the King by Matthew: He is not just a king over the people of Israel; rather, He is king over all nature as well.

Following the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5 to 7 which sets out Jesus' authority in teaching, chapters 8 and 9 focus largely on Jesus' miracles. These demonstrated His authority in actions as they consistently pointed to a power that could belong to God alone. With a word, Jesus was able to heal the sick (Matthew 8:5-13), cleanse lepers (Luke 17:12-19), exorcise evil spirits (Mark 7:24-30) and command the forces of nature (Mark 11:12-14, 19-21). These miracles divide themselves rather neatly into two groups: (a) therapeutic miracles (miracles of healing), in which the sick are returned to health or the possessed are freed of demons (chaps. 8-9); and (b) nontherapeutic miracles, which have to do with exercising power over the forces of nature. His miracles established that Jesus was either the most wonderful prophet ever sent by God or that He was something more than a prophet. Even for His own disciples there was much discussion as to His 'real' identity.

The storm on the Lake provoked intense fear among Jesus' disciples, who were in their eyes in imminent danger of drowning. Jesus was present and had a different perspective. It was still relatively early in His ministry and Jesus' burgeoning reputation as prophet, healer, teacher and

dare we say Messiah had raised many questions about His real identity, (Matt. 16:12-14). While it might take the general public time to fully grasp Jesus true identity and some never will; it was important the disciples understand who Jesus was!

Note with much seriousness the reaction of the disciples and the writer of the Book of Matthew who give us the credentials of the promised King of Israel. The One who sleeps from fatigue is also as one writer states, **“God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten, not made”**.

How Jesus spoke and acted in the face of that fear deepened the disciples understanding of who He was and teach us some important ‘do’s’ and ‘don’ts’ when we face the storms of life.

Note however the significance of this. Jesus, whom the disciples had seen before this incident doing mighty miracles call the disciples “cowards” for their reaction to a powerful storm. We are thus led to wonder what we are when we claim to be believers.

So where is your faith when you encounter the tempests and tensions of life in this fallen world?

This is a question you must answer honestly for it will assist in helping you determine where you really are in your Christian walk.

Now we must consider that the writer Matthew was not a fisherman like Peter, James, John, and Andrew. He was a Tax collector and not one accustomed to bailing water out of a boat in a storm. His Tax booth would never sink. But now, after this man who had called him and said, **“Follow Me”**, and who he had seen cast out demons, heal all kinds of sicknesses, rebuke the powerful Scribes and Pharisees, now would sleep peacefully while his life and the life of the other disciples were apparently threatened. This helps us appreciate Matthew’s feeling about this incident and his awe about Jesus’ power.

It is most important however that in the light of the Psalms 107 Background Scripture, and the experience of the blameless and upright Job, (see Job1:9-12), as well as the experience of the badly behaving prophet Jonah where God had to send a **“great wind”** so that Jonah’s ship was threatened to break up by this mighty tempest (note we are reminded that Jonah was sleeping peacefully and unconcerned throughout this tempest), we must consider that God can send a storm to shake up Jonah, and also allow the devil to send a **“great wind”** (Job 1:18-19) to shatter Job’s so far quiet life. The question arises as to who sent this **“great storm and wind”** on this Sea of Galilee? One writer poses this interesting question given that Scriptures teach that God is always in control of events:

**“Was Satan sending this storm to try to drown Jesus or to cause the disciples to doubt Jesus? Was God sending this storm to cause the disciples to trust in Jesus more than they had before?”**

**Well honestly, we don’t know. But that, dear saints, is the point. Either way, whether the devil was behind the storm or God was, God was in control of the whole situation even though it seemed like He didn’t care and was sleeping...**



**The question from our Lord's lips confronts us today. What are you afraid of? The devil may be behind the things you fear. Satan may want you to enter "emergency mode", "crisis mode". God doesn't care and is in sleeping mode. The devil wants nothing more than to rob you of the peace and security that comes from being a child of God.**

**So repent. The devil is very cunning and dangerous, but he is also totally and completely predictable.**

**But what is God doing in allowing you to experience those things that you fear? Why is God permitting Satan to do these things to you?.....**

**We know why the devil knocked the house onto Job's children, but we aren't told in the whole Book of Job why God allowed the devil to do it. We might think that God sent the storm upon Jonah in order to get Jonah to Nineveh to preach and call these people to repent, but there may have been even more reasons that we are completely unaware of as well".**

The Providence of God is something that Job could not deal with when God began to explain the complexity of His management. We ourselves cannot completely understand why God works the way He does. Our knowledge and understanding are so incomplete. But we know a day is coming when we will not be looking through a glass darkly.

Hence, we cannot stress too much the critical importance of trusting in God. We know He cares and is not apathetic. Looking at your troubles cannot make you assess properly what God is doing and what He thinks of you.

Jesus' ministry in Matthew's Gospel takes place mostly in Galilee, the northern portion of ancient Israel. The region was named for the body of water at its center, known in the New Testament as the Sea of Galilee or the Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1). It is about thirteen miles north to south and seven and a half miles at its widest. Its size makes it more of a "lake" than a "sea" and it is referred to as "the Lake of Gennesaret" in Luke 5:1. It is the only freshwater lake in the land and so a great place for fishing. The fishing villages of Capernaum and Bethsaida so frequently mentioned in the gospels were on the north- west and north shores of the lake.

The Sea of Galilee sits in a depression that is almost seven hundred feet below sea level, surrounded by mountains that rise to about two thousand feet above sea level on the eastern side. When winds funnel down those hills, it can create sudden, violent storms. It was one of those unexpected storms that hit the evening of our text, unexpected to the disciples, but not to the Lord Jesus.

Matthew records Jesus' response to two 'would-be' disciples just prior to the Study Text (vs. 19-22). One appears to be swept along in the euphoria of Jesus public ministry, without due thought to the rigors and responsibilities of discipleship. The other sees discipleship as a matter of convenience and misses its priority. Jesus' words are less than encouraging to both and then the event of the Study Text sheds light on some of the realities of discipleship.



We cannot stress too much therefore that a storm on the Lake is the setting for the event and brings us to the unsettling reality that God sometimes leads His people into a storm. Further along this line, obedience to God's leading will at times bring 'storms' into the lives of believers.

Jesus' presence in 'your' boat is no guarantee it will not be hit by bad weather. This storm hit those with Christ in their boat as well as those without Christ in their boat. Mark 4:36 records that other boats were with them. If this were a fairy tale, we might read that when the storm arose, the other boats were swamped, but the boat with Christ had smooth sailing. The fact is, Christians are not magically exempted from the storms of life.

We will note several features of the storm in our Study that are characteristic of trials in our own lives. Often trials hit suddenly and without warning. The time to develop resources to face the sudden storms that inevitably will strike is before they happen. If we do not spend time with the Lord in the calm of life, we will not know how to trust Him in the storms. The Lord brings trials to spur maturity in believers, (James 1:2-4). Since Jesus is Lord overall, we must trust Him in the storms of life.

Luke 8:22-25 relates this miracle of Jesus' calming the storm as the first of a series of miracles that culminate in Peter's confession (9:20). These miracles have much to teach us (as they taught the disciples) about who Jesus is and what that means to us in the trials of life. Today's Lesson will fill in some blanks for the disciples and teach us much about our necessary faith in Jesus Christ.

Note that Jesus did not use His divine power for His own benefit (Matthew 4:1-11; 26:53). His miracles were for the sake of others, especially those whose situation seemed hopeless. *And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.* (Matt. 9:35; 4:23).

As such, the miracles were signs that God's kingdom, His promised reign over all creation that restores His righteous purpose was breaking into the world. God's reign will vanquish the sin-threat and its consequences. God's people would then live in His presence, safe and secure, for eternity. Jesus' miracles demonstrated that promised future. (The events of today's text are also recorded in Mark 4:35-41 and Luke 8:22-25.)

Structurally the incident has three parts, based on the three things that were said. The first part is the storm on the sea and the disciples' words to Jesus.

The second section is Jesus' rebuke of the disciples and then the calming of the storm.

The third is the disciples' amazement and their words about Jesus.

### **THE TEXT**

Verse 23. *And when he was entered into a ship...* this phrase invites the reader to connect this story to the ones just prior (Matthew 8:18-22). There Jesus encountered two men as He was about to cross the lake in *a ship*. Both wanted to follow Jesus and He pointed them to the cost



of discipleship. God's Kingdom brings His promised blessings to His people, but it may cost those people everything they have (Matthew 13:44–46). It is unclear from that Text if either man ended up following Jesus (Luke 9:57–62) but we are left with the impression they did not join the disciples.

The Sea of Galilee was and still is infamous for its sudden and violent storms (Gr. *seismos*). They occur because of geographical conditions. The water is six hundred feet below sea level and the land to the east is considerably higher. As warm air rises from the lake it creates a vacuum that the air on the west rushes in to fill. This brings strong winds on the lake with little warning.

*His disciples followed him....* this is the proper response of a disciple to Jesus, in view of verses 18 to 22.

Matthew does not specify Jesus' intended destination at this point (Mark 4:35; Luke 8:22). Matthew 8:28 informs us that He and His disciples were headed to "*the country of the Gergesenes,*" on the east side of the lake. Jesus must have gotten into the boat in the region of Capernaum, on the northwest shore, because He got out of the boat "*on the other side*" near Kursi (on the eastern shore about halfway down the coast).

We should note that any follower of Jesus may be referred to in the Gospels as a disciple (Matthew 27:57). The term refers to a learner who accepts and assists in spreading the teaching of another. But since the ship obviously had some size limitations, the disciples mentioned were most likely only the twelve originals (Matthew 10:1–4). As they boarded the ship, they did so in obedience, following their teacher. In Matthew's Gospel, this band of disciples is just beginning to emerge as an identifiable unit.

Jesus did not choose these twelve because they were exemplary in every way. All four Gospels portray them largely as failing to understand Jesus' mission (Matthew 16:13–27; Mark 10:35–45; wLuke 18:15–17; John 4:25–38). They were often fearful and spiritually deaf (Matthew 14:27; Mark 4:40; Luke 9:45). As he went to His death, He predicted that they would all fall away, even as He looked forward to welcoming them back after His resurrection (Matthew 26:31–32; see 28:16–20). They continued to misunderstand His mission at least up until the time of His ascension (Acts 1:6).

Verse 24. *And, behold, there arose a great tempest ...* as noted earlier, the Sea of Galilee was and still is infamous for its sudden and violent storms (*tempest* = Gr. *seismos*). The Greek word 'seismos' is used to mean an earthquake. It also can mean a great storm, but it basically means a great shaking. The physical geography of its location makes the lake prone to these events and as sometimes happened on this lake, a storm *arose* that took the experienced boatmen by surprise.

Storms in Galilee typically travel west to east from the Mediterranean Sea. The area to the immediate west of the lake consists of steep, high hills separated by narrow valleys. That means



that storms can appear from the west with little warning for those on the lake, since their view of approaching weather is blocked by the hills.

*... that the ship was covered with the wave...* the word Matthew used to describe the boat (*plouion*) could fit a boat of many different sizes. However, it is probable that this was a fishing boat that carried at least a dozen or more people, plus fish, across the lake. Matthew probably would have used a different word if it were a larger boat.

The remains of a first-century fishing boat were discovered along the shore in 1986. Its size (about 27 feet in length and 8 feet in width) indicates that *waves* of just a couple of feet could overwhelm such a vessel, especially when accompanied by rain. In deep water far from shore, these men faced death if their ship did not stay afloat.

*But he was asleep...* Mark's account specifies that Jesus was "*in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow*" (Mark 4:38). This refers to the stern of the vessel.

Somehow Jesus was sleeping through the rain, wind, waves and noise. The Psalmist presents sleep as the answer of a confident believer to the dangers of this world (Psalms 3:5; 4:8). Jesus shows no fear because He truly has no reason to fear. We can safely assume that a deadly storm would awaken most, if not all, of us. But Jesus experienced a freedom from fear that is unlike any in our ordinary experiences. This surely points to Jesus' confidence in His identity. He knew His mission was leading Him to the cross (John 12:23–36; 19:30); He would not die on the sea.

Jesus' sleep is significant to consider for a moment. Here we have a very human characteristic. He was exhausted from His ministry with the crowds and so in the boat He was asleep during the storm. It is a reminder that Jesus was truly human, (John 4:6-7).

Verse 25. *... and awoke him, saying, Lord. . Save us: we perish...* in spite of the storm, Jesus continued to sleep. Finally, the disciples realized their inability to cope with their situation and called on Jesus to help ("*save*") them. They obviously thought He could do something to help, at least bail or at most perform a miracle. They had seen Him perform many miracles. However, their reaction to His help reveals that they did not yet appreciate who He was.

Compare the story of Jonah, who also had to be awakened during a storm at sea. However, rather than praying for God's help, as the sailors called on Jonah to do, Jesus used His own authority to still the sea. A greater than Jonah was here (12:41).

Note, while Jesus slept through the tremendous noise of the storm, He heard the voice of the disciples in the storm!

Unlike Jesus, *the disciples* registered their peril. These were seasoned fishermen but their skills on the water were not enough to protect them from this grave danger. They were all going to



die! For Jesus to be sleeping through the storm was incomprehensible to them. They did not yet understand Jesus' identity.

The disciples needed someone more powerful than themselves. And to their credit, they at least knew who that someone was. Other boats were also out on the water (Mark 4:36), but the disciples were focused on their own peril as they addressed Jesus as *Lord*. This term ascribed authority to Him, but exactly what kind of authority they meant is not entirely clear.

While obviously God is often called Lord, the Greek word translated in this way can just mean Master or Sir (Matthew 6:24; 27:63). It is possible that the disciples acknowledged Jesus as their teacher, but not as equal to God at this time. Perhaps that idea is like a seed in their minds, about to germinate.

The disciples still had much to learn about Jesus. Even when Peter later declared Jesus to be "*the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matthew 16:16), the disciple immediately showed that what he had just confessed he did not yet understand (16:21–27). A clearer understanding of what it meant for Jesus to be the Christ would not come to the disciples until after He rose to life from the grave (Luke 24:26–34). Still, the disciples already knew enough to call Him Lord, one superior to them in authority in some way.

*Save us: we perish...* these were seasoned fishermen crying out to a 'Carpenter on a lake where they spent hours night and day. It is an amazing testimony for their regard to the Lord Jesus. They were willing and it almost seems instinctive to renounce all human ability for the divine ability which they saw in the Lord Jesus. It must have been a severe storm! The fishermen come to Jesus in desperation and let Him know it!

Mark's account has the disciples saying "*Carest not that we perish?*" This was something of a rude vote of no confidence in a moment of despair. We can see here a mixture of faith and unbelief in the hearts of the disciples. They clearly have some idea of the greatness of his power, but at the same time they were disturbed over what appeared to be a lack of concern for their wellbeing on the part of the Lord.

They have not yet learned that a storm with the Lord Jesus on board is much better than a calm without Him. Sometimes believers have to endure storms to learn to trust the Lord and so He leads us into trials to strengthen our 'little faith'. Jesus should be the believers' first choice to appeal for help in trouble and to give thanks in stable times.

For many believers, the concept of being saved refers primarily (if not exclusively) to God's gift of salvation from sin and death (Ephesians 2:4–8). In Jesus' day, however, the Greek word translated *save* and its variants were used for all kinds of rescuing. It was often used by political and military leaders who took credit for benefits they brought to the people they led. This was especially true of the emperors, who "saved" the people in their empire through the Pax



Romana (the “Roman Peace”). This was the Old Testament use of the term " save" meaning physical deliverance (Matt. 14:30; John 12:27; Acts 23:24; 27:20,31; 28:1,4; James 5:15).

The Greek word behind the translation could also be used of any act that brought benefit to those in need or protection for those in danger (Luke 23:39). Clearly the disciples were asking Jesus to save them from drowning in the stormy sea, not requesting eternal salvation.

We too cry out to Jesus in this way at times. We also fear perishing physically because of events , some of our own making in this sin-sick world. When we look at the disciples in this account, in many ways we are looking in a mirror.

*Verse 26. And he saith unto them, , Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.*

.. *Why are ye fearful* ... terrible storm or not, the disciples had more than enough reasons to trust Jesus. The mighty power He had already demonstrated was more than adequate evidence (Matthew 4:23–25; 8:1–13).

... *O ye of little faith?*... their fear stemmed from their *little faith*. The word being translated occurs five times in the Gospels (here and Matthew 6:30; 14:31; 16:8; and Luke 12:28). Its use indicates a mild rebuke. If they had much faith, they could trust that Jesus would act for them, even if He did not act immediately. By this point in their experience with Jesus, the disciples should have been able to recognize that such dangers or any danger pose no real threat, given the evidence of miracles.

This fact should have resulted in showing more courage when facing situations that normally result in fear and anxiety. The five uses of “little faith” reveal sadly that this would not be the last time Jesus would chastise them in this regard.

Even so, despite their doubts about His concern for them, that they were disturbed and upset, it was His idea to cross the lake, but there was in their minds an essential attitude of trust in Him that brought them instinctively to Jesus and in their cry, they expressed their ‘little faith’. The Lord rebukes them and delivers them!

*My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction.* (Prov. 3:11).

Jesus’ words challenged the disciples to let their faith grow to fit the magnitude of their Lord’s power and His gracious goodwill to use it on their behalf. Elsewhere, Jesus taught that “faith as a grain of mustard seed” could move a mountain (Matthew 17:20). Little faith has potential, but in this case, it was paralyzed by fear.

...*rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm*... the winds and the sea became perfectly calm at Jesus’ rebuke. The disciples were absolutely astonished at His power, even over nature. This was an unmistakable demonstration of Jesus’ deity. Only the creator can control nature.

(See Psalm 107:23-32).





*Who is like you, LORD God Almighty?*

*You, LORD, are mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you.  
You rule over the surging sea;  
when its waves mount up, you still them. (Psalm 89:8, 9).*

Jesus' rebuke of *the winds and the sea* is something of a counterpart to His rebuke of the disciples' little faith. Some believe that the Lord will meet their needs only if they have enough faith to satisfy Him. But Jesus saves the small of faith even as He urges them on to greater faith. We should realize, however, that having little faith is perilously close to having no faith (Matthew 17:14–20).

For a moment, the act of saving in the Lesson Text foreshadows saving for eternity. The angel announced to Joseph before Jesus' birth, "*He shall save his people from their sins*" (Matthew 1:21).

Jesus' mighty deeds were visible signs of the greater work He would do to cleanse the guilty and restore them as God's eternal people (Titus 2:11–14).

Jesus' followers went on to face many perilous situations that could easily and often did take their lives. They ultimately learned to rely on Jesus to protect them, even to restore life by resurrection (2 Corinthians 4:17). He will always use His almighty, divine power for the long-term benefit of those who love Him. That is true even when (or especially when) the situation seems hopeless, and He seems unresponsive to our need (See Psalm 22:2; Revelation 6:10).

*"I cry out to you, God, but you do not answer;  
I stand up, but you merely look at me. (Job 30:20).*

Verse 27. *But the men marveled...* it is one thing to intellectually grasp that Jesus is the Creator, but something else to actually witness nature submitting to Him; the disciples were awestruck. This is the frequent reaction when people see Jesus' mighty power at work in the form of Miracles and in Word (Matthew 9:33; 15:31; 21:20; 22:22; 27:14). Mark emphasizes only the great fear of the disciples (Mark 4:41). *Saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!*

... *What manner of man is this ...* the disciples recognized that what Jesus did was not the work of an ordinary *man*, to put it mildly. They experienced what some today call "cognitive dissonance". What they saw, Jesus commands *the winds and the sea* and both obey Him, did not match the normal; storms do not obey human commands! This was contrary to the 'natural order'; the magnitude, scope and implications of the miracle said; this person is God!

As God's words put the waters of the seas in their place (Genesis 1:9–10), so Jesus' words did with the storm. The New Testament makes clear that Jesus is the Creator. That the Creator is able to command His own creation in a miraculous way should not surprise us (John 11:1–4; Colossians 1:16).



They had seen Jesus perform many healings and exorcisms, but this was a new revelation of the extent of His authority (Ps. 107:23-30). Still, they did not understand who He really was, as is clear from their question.

This story should encourage all of Jesus' disciples with the knowledge that He can control the natural circumstances of life, including its storms and keep them safe.

Psalms 107:23–32 describes a scene very much like the one the disciples had just experienced. Men went out to sea, witnessing the wonders of the waters God created. A storm arose, lifting huge waves, provoking terror in the sailors. They cried out to the Lord, the God of Israel, for protection. God stilled the storm, eliciting joy and thanksgiving from those whose lives had been spared. There was no doubt who had saved them (See Jonah 2:1–9).

Jesus had just done what the psalmist described God as doing. Only the one who created the wind and the waves in the first place can command them. In Jesus, God took on human nature a man. Because of His mighty power that He graciously exercised on humanity's behalf they have nothing to fear.

## **CONCLUSION**

Note that we have been looking at two storms. One was on the Sea of Galilee. The other was in the heart of the disciples.

What do you fear? Typically, the things that make us most afraid are those that threaten us in some way because they are beyond our control. Instead of first praying, we try our best to gain control. But in the end, we recognize that our control is very limited. Disease stalks even those who eat right and exercise. Financial crises strike even the prudent. Accidents happen to the careful. Our protective reach cannot constantly extend as far as those we love.

Pay close attention to the fact of the principle of the trial of faith.

As a matter of fact a person comes to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ almost always because of the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing the tests of pressures to bear on that person. The Spirit then will permit the winds to blow and the trials and tragedies to come to test the faith the Holy spirit has brought and to develop that faith. So James tells us:

***“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing”.***

Be careful to note that “faith” is not the same as feelings. One writer comments:

**“If faith were feelings, the apostles would have lost most of their faith in this incident. Feelings are up and down depending on the circumstances of life—feelings related to our**



**happiness—but faith is something much more substantial. And consequently, faith is the trust in the savior that takes us through the experiences of life”.**

Note also there is value in the weakest faith. Their little or not strong trust made the disciples cry out and express their little faith.

You can therefore be confident that since God has begun a good work in you, the Spirit bringing that initial faith, He will complete it and work in you and transform you so that you will be perfect in the Day of Jesus Christ.

So remember always there is sufficiency in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is a caring Saviour. He is full of concern for you. His atoning sacrifice for you on the Cross should make you aware of that. He will always ensure you will have safe passage.

Bring the trials of life to the Saviour. With Jesus on board with you there is no possibility of your boat sinking. No matter what happens you will always be with Him. You will marvel at His answers.

There is a far superior alternative to trying to maintain control over our circumstances first and when that fails, turning to the Lord. The alternative is to reverse those priorities. Because Jesus gave His life for us, we can surely trust Him to do for us what He did for ‘twelve’ men of ‘little faith’ in a small ship and more.

The created world is filled with mortal dangers. Our reaction should be that of the psalmist: *He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.* (Psalm 91:1–3).

