

Why Are You Afraid?

Bible Background • MATTHEW 8:23–27; MARK 4:35–41; LUKE 8:22–25

Printed Text • MATTHEW 8:23–27 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 107:23–32

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will CONSIDER the feelings of the disciples when a storm overtook their boat while Jesus was asleep, IDENTIFY the crises that cause adults to worry about themselves and their families, and RESPOND to the promised presence of Jesus in bad times as well as good times.

In Focus

Shala had gone through a lot in her life: she had lived through a dysfunctional family, mental and physical abuse, and depression. Yet, she found God at an early age and accepted Jesus as her Lord and Savior. She and her husband Bill tried to obey God in every way. Shala had known pain and suffering throughout her life, but it was nothing compared to the pain and suffering she experienced when her daughter Joan rebelled against God.

Joan had grown up in church, been taught about Jesus and His principles, and watched her parents live out those principles daily in their own lives. She said she had given her heart to God as well. However, when Shala was diagnosed with breast cancer soon after her daughter's fourteenth birthday, Joan turned her back on God and her rebellion lasted for over ten years.

Shala could not understand why these things happened. She felt that she and her husband had trained their daughter in the nurture and admonition of God. However, the child still rebelled! Shala and Bill were rocked almost as much as Joan, but through it all, Shala and her husband learned to trust in God. They dug their spiritual roots deep into God through prayer, praise, and reading His Holy Word.

What has been your greatest fear in life? How have you brought the issue to God? How has God helped you in it?

Keep in Mind

"Jesus responded, 'Why are you afraid? You have so little faith!' Then he got up and rebuked the wind and waves, and suddenly there was a great calm" (Matthew 8:26, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Tempest (Matthew 8:24) seismos (Gk.) — To agitate or shake; specifically, an earthquake or violent windstorm

B. Marvelled (v. 27) thaumazo (Gk.) — To wonder, be awed, or struck with admiration or astonishment

Say It Correctly

Chaotic. kay-OH-tick.

Capernaum. cay-PUR-nay-um.

KJV

Matthew 8:23 And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.

24 And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.

25 And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.

26 And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

27 But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!

NLT

Matthew 8:23 Then Jesus got into the boat and started across the lake with his disciples.

24 Suddenly, a fierce storm struck the lake, with waves breaking into the boat. But Jesus was sleeping.

25 The disciples went and woke him up, shouting, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"

26 Jesus responded, "Why are you afraid? You have so little faith!" Then he got up and rebuked the wind and waves, and suddenly there was a great calm.

27 The disciples were amazed. "Who is this man?" they asked. "Even the winds and waves obey him!"

The People, Places, and Times

Chaotic Seas. In the Jewish mind, the sea represents chaos and mystery and therefore offers many opportunities to showcase the awesome power of God. He does what He wants with the raging sea, showing that He is sovereign over all creation. This can be seen from the very first lines of Scripture (Genesis 1:2). One of the greatest miracles recorded in the Bible is Israel's crossing of the Red Sea. Jesus displays His divine power over the chaotic seas multiple times, when He calms the storm, and when He walks on the water. The one who divided the waters and the seas from the dry land can also stop them from overwhelming us when they threaten our lives. The water is not sovereign; God is.

Matthew. Matthew, originally named Levi, was a Jewish tax collector who became one of Jesus' Twelve disciples. Matthew responded to Jesus' call and followed Him (Mark 2:14). When Jesus went to Matthew's home, Matthew held a banquet and invited other tax collectors and people who needed to meet and follow Jesus.

Using his skills at record-keeping and attention to detail, Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience about the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy which validated Jesus as the Messiah, the everlasting King. The themes in the Gospel of Matthew include: Jesus Christ, the King; the fulfilled prophecy of the Messiah; the kingdom of God; and Jesus' teachings.

Background

To show His power and authority over everything that He has created, the Lord will sometimes personally intervene and override the laws of nature. These miracles most often occur as a result of prayer when God's people call out for help or deliverance. Scripture provides many examples of these kinds of miracles. One such miracle is God personally feeding the Israelites bread from heaven during their extended journey in the wilderness (Exodus 16:4). Another is when God slowed the rotation of the earth, allowing Joshua more time to completely defeat his enemies (Joshua 10:12–14). When calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus personally overrode nature at the request of His disciples.

At-A-Glance

1. The Peaceful Savior (Matthew 8:23–24)
2. The Panicked Sailors (vv. 25–27)

In Depth

1. The Peaceful Savior (Matthew 8:23–24) The Sea of Galilee is really a small freshwater lake about 600 feet below sea level, about six miles wide and eight miles long. High mountains surround the lake on three sides. The Jordan River flows from the southern end of the Sea of Galilee down to the Dead Sea (about 1300 feet below sea level). The mountains around the lake and the downward flow of the Jordan create a natural funnel. When winds blow down from the mountains through this funnel, they often produce sudden, violent storms. It was in just such a storm that Jesus first demonstrated His power over the elements.

Jesus had been healing many people in the area of Capernaum: the centurion's servant, Peter's mother-in-law, and many others with demons and sicknesses. Jesus wished to leave the crowds behind for a while. After warning some early followers about the cost of being His disciple, the small fishing boat set sail for the opposite shore carrying Jesus and faithful disciples. The eastern shore was much less populated, so Jesus and His disciples would be able to rest and refresh themselves.

As the boat made its way across the lake, Jesus gave in to His weariness. He made His way to the back of the boat, stretched out on a cushion on the steersman's seat, and dropped off into a deep, peaceful slumber. Our Lord's fatigue reminds us that He had the same physical needs and limitations as we have.

How is Jesus able to sleep, even while a storm is raging?

2. The Panicked Sailors (vv. 25–27) Several men in the boat with Jesus that day were seasoned fishermen. They had probably experienced these storms firsthand and knew what to do when the sea turned ugly. But this storm was something they could not face.

A violent wind swept down toward the lake. Huge waves swamped the boat and the men know their lives were in danger (Luke 8:23). They cannot save themselves. In desperation they turn to Jesus: “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!” (Matthew 8:25, NLT). The second they called on Jesus, He immediately stopped the wind. He taught them a lesson in faith and called them to examine themselves.

Jesus awakes from His slumber and scolds the fearful disciples. “Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?” (v. 26). Even early in His ministry, the disciples are beginning to suspect who Jesus truly, fully is. The disciples personally witnessed Jesus perform many miracles, but when the going got tough, they panicked. Jesus rose from the place and spoke to the storm. Immediately, tranquility reigned over the water.

Many are the storms of life that burden our souls; some of them, like the storm, may threaten to overwhelm us. But when problems and trials seem to overwhelm us, we should know that we are not alone. When the storms of life are raging, we can take heart in the fact that Jesus is with us in our situation.

Why do we wait until we run out of options before we call on the Lord?

Search the Scriptures

1. What was Jesus doing while the disciples were fighting to keep the boat afloat in the windstorm? (Matthew 8:24)
2. What did the disciples do when faced with a situation beyond their control? (v. 25)
3. What question did the disciples ask about Jesus after He had rebuked the storm? (v. 27)

Discuss the Meaning

Most people have to experience the fear of thinking they have no way out of a problem. Perhaps you have even become discouraged, feeling overwhelmed by a storm of life. Bad experiences may cause us to believe that no one cares about our problems. We seek assurance when facing these battles. While believers are not exempted from experiencing life’s storms, we can trust in God’s timing, recognizing His sovereign power over our lives and our world. Even though God might not answer at the immediate sign of trouble in our lives, we can find assurance in knowing that God cares about the issues causing us anxiety and will respond to our earnest pleas for help. When He does move, just watch how God’s power is swift to restore order and calm to our lives!

Liberating Lesson

Most people have to experience the fear of thinking they have no way out of a problem. Perhaps you have even become discouraged, feeling overwhelmed by a storm of life. Bad experiences may cause us to believe that no one cares about our problems. We seek assurance when facing these battles. While believers are not exempted from experiencing life’s storms, we can trust in

God's timing, recognizing His sovereign power over our lives and our world. Even though God might not answer at the immediate sign of trouble in our lives, we can find assurance in knowing that God cares about the issues causing us anxiety and will respond to our earnest pleas for help. When He does move, just watch how God's power is swift to restore order and calm to our lives!

Application for Activation

Make a list of the things in your life that cause you to worry. Then make a second list of things you need the Lord to provide for you. Be careful to list only your needs, not your desires. For the next month, set aside one day each week to pray and fast for these things. At the end of the month check off the prayers the Lord has answered. Be prepared to share your testimony with the class.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Matthew 8:23-27 Jesus and the disciples are caught in a terrible windstorm while crossing the Sea of Galilee. The disciples are awed when they see that even the forces of nature must obey the commands of Christ.

23 And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. 24 And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. 25 And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. Most of the disciples had grown up around the Sea of Galilee and several of them were seasoned fishermen. They were familiar with the sudden storms common to the lake. But they had never seen anything like this. The word used (Gk. seismos, SAZE-moce) is usually translated "earthquake" (Matthew 27:54; Acts 16:26) and is rarely associated with the water.

After doing all they could to keep the boat afloat, the frightened disciples called out to Jesus for help. The fearful men woke the Lord from His peaceful slumber, all shouting at once. One cried, "Master, master, we perish" (Luke 8:24). Another shouted, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" (Mark 4:38), and a third pleaded, "Lord, save us; we perish" (Matthew 8:25). Their

language is that of extreme terror. The three exclamations recorded by the three writers describe three possible responses to the troubles that afflict us. Some of us may think that the Lord is unaware of the depth of our torment. Others realize that God knows all, but because He is not acting the way we think He should, we begin to wonder if He even cares. Finally, some simply cry out in desperation, "Lord, if you don't save me, I'll perish!"

The prayer Matthew records begins by acknowledging the person of Christ as "Lord" and ends with an appeal to His power to "save us." "Lord" (Gk. kurios, KOO-ree-oce) acknowledges Christ as our Master. Since the disciples belong to Him, it is His responsibility to act on their behalf. Their pleas of "save us" (Gk. sozo, SODE-zo) means "to deliver from danger or death." It can refer to physical or spiritual peril. Is this not the prayer of all believers? Do we not come to Christ with the initial prayer, "Lord, save me from death"? We continue our walk with the plea, "Lord, deliver me from the evil of the world." Such is the state of the true disciple of Christ. We are completely dependent on Him for deliverance and care. The reason Christ delays or sometimes appears to be sleeping is to bring us to the point of utter surrender, to force us to acknowledge that without Him we will surely perish.

26 And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. The Lord's disappointment with His disciples is apparent. Without moving, He looks at the frightened men and scolds them for their lack of faith. Jesus is not upset because the men woke Him from a peaceful sleep. He is displeased because of their fear. The Lord's question, "Why are ye fearful?" is a question all God's children must ask themselves when we are worried or fearful. Fear indicates a lack of trust in Christ. The Lord had told the disciples they were going to the other side of the lake (Mark 4:35). Since Jesus said it, no power in all creation could prevent the safe crossing from taking place. In spite of the apparent hopelessness of their situation, Jesus expected the disciples to have faith in His word.

Echoing His recent teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord calls them out for their "little faith" (Gk. oligopistos, see Lesson 1, More Light on the Text, v. 30). Their faith depended on seeing Him exercise His power. The words of the disciples when they called out to Jesus indicate that they believed the Lord could save them. They feared because they did not understand that their deliverance was already an accomplished fact. The promises of God are always backed by the power of God. Even when we cannot see God's power at work in our lives, we must take comfort in His promises to save, deliver, and work out all situations for our good (Romans 8:1).

After rebuking the disciples for their lack of faith in His Word, the Lord turns His attention to the source of the men's fear and rebukes it too. Rising from His place of rest, the Lord speaks to the storm. Mark provides us with the very words of the Lord's rebuke: "Peace, be still" (Mark 4:39). As soon as the words leave the Lord's lips, the uproarious winds grow silent and the convulsing sea becomes calm. Since the unpredictable sea is an object of such uncertainty—and therefore fear—in the Jewish mind, a calm sea is seen as a special blessing. The "calm" (Gk. galene, gah-LAYnay) here is specifically the calmness of a vast expanse, and also recalls the "still small voice" Elijah encounters as the power and presence of God (1 Kings 19:12).

27 But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him! The sudden, quiet stillness of the sea and the wind must have disconcerted the men. Nothing moved, not a sound was heard. The astonished men probably stood for several seconds in open-mouthed wonder and when they spoke, their words expressed their astonishment. They “marvelled” (Gk. thaumazo, thow-MOD-zo) or were struck with admiration and astonishment at the miracle. Jesus had given them new proof of His control over the forces of nature. Even the winds and waves obeyed Him at a word. The Lord’s dominion over the wind and the waves was the dominion God gave to Adam before the fall (Genesis 1:28). The first Adam lost His dominion to the prince of the air (Ephesians 2:2). Christ, the second Adam, used this incident to demonstrate the future restoration of humanity’s dominion over creation.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Do Not Fear the Storm
(Mark 4:35-41)

TUESDAY

Do Not Fear Persecution
(Matthew 24:9-14)

WEDNESDAY

No Separation from God's Love
(Romans 8:31-39)

THURSDAY

I Have Overcome the World
(John 16:25-33)

FRIDAY

Choose to Follow Me Now!
(Matthew 8:18-22)

SATURDAY

Jesus Delivers the Demon-Possessed
(Matthew 8:28-34)

SUNDAY

Jesus Stills the Stormy Seas
(Matthew 8:23-27)