

## Matthew 8E

- Of all Jesus' miracles recorded in the Bible, the ones that most impress us are usually those involving power over nature
  - o Parting the Red Sea for Moses, making the sun stand still for Joshua, causing fire to come down and consume a wet sacrifice for Elijah...
    - It's the stuff of movie special effects
    - Miracles like those rightly fascinate us because they break the rules of nature, which to us seem unbreakable
  - o These types of miracles are more impressive to us than even bringing a dead body back to life
    - Probably because they operate on such a unimaginable scale and are accomplished by such awesome power
    - Nothing says you're God more than making the physical world obey your voice
  - o So naturally, the Lord's ministry on earth included His share of miracles over Creation
    - A few come to mind immediately...
    - Walking on water, multiplying bread and fish, causing fish to enter Peter's nets
    - And then there's the one we study tonight...Jesus stilling the storm on the Galilee
  - o This miracle opens the next section of Jesus' miracles, which are loosely organized around a theme of Jesus' limitless power
    - The first miracle shows Jesus' power over the natural world, in the same way as those miracles from the Old Testament
    - The second miracle shows Jesus' power over animals and His power in the coming judgement
    - A the third will show Jesus' power and authority to extend forgiveness
  - As we've noted before, these miracles are part of Matthew's theme that Jesus is the Creator God Who has power and authority over all things

Matt. 8:23 When He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him.

Matt. 8:24 And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep.

Matt. 8:25 And they came to Him and woke Him, saying, “Save us, Lord; we are perishing!”

Matt. 8:26 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.

Matt. 8:27 The men were amazed, and said, “What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?”

- You may remember last week that Jesus was standing in a boat on the Galilee as He called His disciples to obey Him and follow Him
  - o So now having made those comments, Jesus is ready to proceed across the Sea of Galilee to Garasa with His key disciples in the boat
    - People have found ancient fishing boats in the mud of the Galilee shoreline
    - So we have a pretty good idea of the style and size of boats in use during that period
  - o Generally, they were around 30 ft long, 8 ft wide and probably about 5 ft deep
    - They had a flat bottom design to allow the boat to get close to the shore
    - On either end were benches covered with cushions for reclining in the boat
    - And they had masts and oars for navigation and propulsion
  - o Most likely that's the type of boat Jesus entered with His disciples to travel across the lake
    - Though these boats weren't huge, they were still large enough to easily carry a dozen men in calm seas
    - But with so much weight onboard, the boat was probably riding low in the water
    - The sides of the boat were likely only 12-18 inches above the waterline
  - As they traveled from Magdala to Garasa, they moved due east cutting across the northern tip of the body of water

- o The trip probably took a couple of hours by rowing or less if they had the prevailing westerly winds in their favor
  - That track would have kept them relatively near the shore, probably not more than a mile or so off shore at any given time
  - Yet despite being near the shore, they were in deep water
  - The Sea of Galilee is a deep fresh water lake, and in the area where Jesus crossed, it was probably about 80 ft deep
- o The depth of the lake combined with the high hills and mountains surrounding the lake contributes violent weather patterns
  - High winds can race down the hills to the water's surface leading to fast rising storms
  - Even in calm weather, the lake can become stormy
- o It's common for the lake to start glassy smooth in the morning hours when winds are calm
  - But by late afternoon in the hot desert climate, the winds from the Mediterranean pick up and the lake becomes choppy with rolling waves
  - If a storm system blows through, the lake's relatively small surface area combined with its great depth allows high waves to develop quickly
  - And likewise, when the winds stop blowing, the lake will calm down very quickly as well...much like water in a bathtub
- Now according to Mark, Jesus' crossing happened at the end of the day as night was falling, so the lake would have been choppy already
  - o But then a storm comes up suddenly
    - All three of the Synoptic Gospels describe this particular storm as usually strong and quick to develop
    - Matthew says it was a great storm, Mark says it was a fierce gale of a wind and Luke confirms the same
  - o So this is no ordinary thunderstorm...this was a once-a-year event
    - Matthew says the boat was covered by the waves, and Mark tells us that the waves were breaking over the boat

- This isn't surprising since the boat was low in the water, but it meant the boat was filling with water and in danger of sinking
  - o And the way the disciples reacted – including several who were experienced fishermen – tells us the situation was serious
    - They are on the verge of panic, probably barking orders over the sound of the waves and wind
    - They would have been desperately bailing water out of the boat with their hands or cloaks
    - They would have been trying to steer the boat into the waves to prevent it capsizing
    - It would have been chaos
  - And then we have that statement at the end of v.24 that seems totally out of place...Jesus was asleep in the boat
    - o Mark says He's positioned Himself on a cushion at the stern of the boat where He could catch some shuteye during the two-hour journey
      - Because He is lying on a cushioned bench, He's high enough to stay out of the water filling the bottom of the boat
      - Nevertheless, Jesus is almost certainly getting splashed with water off the waves from time to time, so He's still getting wet
      - Which makes His situation seem crazy to us
    - o But if you're thinking that no one could sleep through a storm like this, then you don't know how it feels to be in war
      - When a soldier is physically exhausted and at his limit, he can sleep almost anywhere
      - He can sleep in rain, wind, sun, cold, anywhere
      - A soldier can even sleep in a foxhole with a battle raging nearby
      - So anyone who has reached his physical limit under difficult conditions could easily sleep in Jesus' circumstances
    - o And we can safely assume that Jesus was physically exhausted from attending to the crowds for days on end
      - He probably never has a free moment interrupted

- Remember, He just said He didn't have a home, so He probably slept outside on many nights
  - And so I wouldn't be surprised if Jesus even had to deal with people waking Him in the night seeking His healing
  - He's probably completely exhausted
- So though it's hard for those of us accustomed to the comforts of modern life to understand, Jesus could sleep under these conditions
    - o A little wind and waves don't bother Him at all
      - But then we have His disciples...
      - Poor Jesus...He just wanted to sleep without interruption, but He can't catch a break
    - o The disciples are fighting for their lives, or so they think,
      - So they felt the need to wake Jesus to inform Him they were perishing
      - Mark adds that some accused Jesus of not caring, as if Jesus was indifferent to their plight
      - These men were experiencing genuine fear for their lives, and they ask Jesus to save them
    - o I think that's a strange request, in a way
      - What did they expect Jesus to do for them?
      - We might assume they expected a miracle, but when Jesus performs a miracle at the end, they are astonished
    - o I don't think they weren't looking for a supernatural response from Jesus at all...I think they just wanted a natural response
      - They wanted to know He cared or that He sensed their concern
      - That's why Mark records them asking if Jesus cared they were perishing
      - They were probably upset that Jesus wasn't lending a hand in the work of bailing out the boat
      - They perceived His sleeping as indifference to their plight, and it made them mad and hurt

- So if circumstances were so dire, why was Jesus so calm?
  - o Well, our first thought is to credit Jesus' divine perspective
    - We assume Jesus could rest easy because He knew He wasn't in real danger in this moment
    - We think Jesus already knew when He would die and how He would die
    - So He knew that His death was happening today and it wasn't going to happen by drowning on the Galilee
    - So Jesus slept free of concerns or reasons to worry
  - o But if you look at Jesus' response to His disciples, I think it leads us to a different conclusion
    - Because Jesus chastises the men for their fear, calling it evidence of too little faith
    - In effect, Jesus is asking them why they were so afraid of this storm?
    - You didn't have to be God to know that things were going to work out ok
  - o Now under most circumstances, that assumption would not be logical
    - The storm was a serious event
    - These men could legitimately be concerned about drowning
    - So fear was a natural reaction
  - Nevertheless, Jesus says their fears were *unreasonable* under *their* circumstances
    - o Why should they not have feared under circumstances that naturally warranted fear?
      - Jesus gives us the answer in the second half of His statement
      - He says they were men of little faith, or we could say insufficient faith
    - o Now when you see the word "faith" used like this, the first question we have to ask is faith in what?

- Remember, faith is a verb that requires an object...you can't say you have "faith" without identifying what you have faith in
  - o So what did they lack faith in?
    - Some have concluded they lacked faith in Jesus' word when He says they were going to cross to the other side of the lake
    - After all, if the Messiah said they would cross to the other side, then by faith they should've expected to survive the storm
  - o This makes some sense, but I think it's a stretch to expect these men to draw that conclusion from Jesus' statement alone
    - Faced with such a serious storm, I wouldn't expect them to dismiss the danger merely because Jesus set out with intentions to cross
    - And I don't think Jesus was expecting that either
  - Instead, I think Jesus expected the men to have greater faith in Jesus' concern for them, since after all they accused Him of not caring for them
    - o In fact, whenever Matthew uses the term "little faith" it's always used in reference to someone who is missing the big picture
      - So what was the big picture in this case?
      - The big picture was that Jesus was in the boat too, and He wasn't worried
      - And if the Lord is with you and isn't worried, what do you have to worry about?
    - o The Lord brought this storm to teach His disciples an important lesson
      - But they weren't responding to the trial with spiritual eyes
      - They were operating in their flesh out of fear
    - o Jesus probably expected His disciples to take note of His posture in the midst of the storm and gain spiritual insight from following the Master
      - Rather than rebuking Jesus for not caring about them, the disciples should have asked themselves *why* wasn't Jesus concerned?

- After all, they knew Jesus was the Messiah, and they knew He had supernatural power
- They may not have assumed He could still the waters by His word, but still they knew He was in communion with the Father
- So if Jesus was sleeping in the boat, they should have concluded Jesus knew something they didn't know
  - o Instead, they assumed *they* knew something Jesus didn't know, which was an absurd conclusion
    - After all, did they seriously think that Jesus was unaware of the storm?
    - So if Jesus isn't fearing the storm, neither should they
    - If Jesus is willing to ride it out, so should they
  - o So their lack of faith was in not trusting Christ's love regardless of their circumstances
    - They didn't lack trust in His identity or even His ability, but in His love for them
    - And because they doubted Jesus' love, they didn't see the storm with spiritual eyes
    - They assumed it came to defeat and destroy them, when in reality it came to test them
  - o They didn't consider that God had a good purpose in bringing the storm, and this was true regardless of how it turned out
    - Perhaps the storm will subside, and all will be well
    - Or perhaps the storm will take their lives, but if so, they'd be in the Kingdom together with Jesus afterward, which is even better
  - o That's how our faith in Jesus should operate during storms in life
    - Don't assume the presence of difficulties means Jesus is uncaring or unwilling to help us
    - Rather, assume He has good purpose in bringing them and seek the benefits these tests offer

- Having faith in Jesus's good intentions allows us to face storms the way Jesus did, at peace with the outcome no matter where it takes us
- o As yourself this...how much differently would this story have ended if the disciples lay down in the boat to sleep with Jesus during the storm?
  - Sure, we wouldn't have seen Jesus perform the miracle that stopped the waves
  - But as amazing as miracles are, how much more amazing would it be for these men to sleep through a violent storm?
  - Jesus could sleep that way because His divine understanding knew there was nothing to fear
  - And the rest of the men could have slept that way too because they were in the same boat as Jesus
- If you think this sounds impossible, that only Jesus could have slept this way, then think back to the story of Jonah
  - o Jonah was riding in a ship that was also in danger of sinking from a storm
    - Experienced sailors aboard had done all they could to save themselves and were resorting to praying for their lives
    - And where was Jonah during the storm? He was asleep in the hold of the ship
  - o So how could Jonah sleep through such difficult circumstances?
    - For the very same reason Jesus was sleeping in His boat
    - Because by His faith Jonah knew there was no reason to fear the outcome of the storm
    - He knew that whether the storm took his life or spared his life, he belonged to the Lord, so Jonah was at peace with the outcome
    - His faith in the Lord allowed him to keep his emotions in check and remain at peace over his circumstances
  - o Now ironically, in Jonah's case he was at peace with dying because it furthered his aim to avoid doing as the Lord had commanded
    - But the point here is the same

- His trust in the Lord and his confidence in a secure eternal future of glory allowed him to set aside concerns for the present
  - He knew the storm couldn't end his relationship with the Lord
  - It couldn't change His eternal destiny, it couldn't rob him of his inheritance in the Kingdom
  - That was the faith Jesus was expecting from His disciples...a confidence that if Jesus is OK, I'm OK
- Believer, you're in the boat with Jesus all the time
    - o So, ask yourself which type of response to life's difficulties will present a better testimony to the unbelieving world?
      - When you face crises in life and you react in fear and anxiety and stress and worry, what does that communicate to the world?
      - And even if Jesus miraculously fixes our bad circumstances, is that what the world will remember most about our situation?
      - Won't they just remember that we panicked like everyone else?
      - They'll take note that we acted just like they did...the only difference is when our situation resolved, we credited Jesus
      - Does that pattern reflect faith in the Lord?
    - o On the other hand, what if we respond to crises like Jesus...resting peacefully in the midst of the storm, then what will people say?
      - What if we set aside anxiety and ended our complaints against God and trusted His goodness
      - What if we praised Him for the blessing of the trial as James tells us to do and as Paul did while in prison?
      - Won't that witness make a lasting impression?
      - Won't they marvel at your faith?
    - o And then, should the Lord choose *not* to rescue us from the danger, the world can marvel at our faith all the more
      - So our witness of faith all comes down to our perspective in trials, not to the outcome of our trials

- The world isn't nearly as impressed by a healing as they are when they see you facing sickness without worry
  - They won't be so impressed when the Lord rescues you from the ashes of disaster, but they'll be amazed when you praise Him for the fire
  - They won't look twice when the Lord spares your life, but they take note when we face death without fear
- o Our reaction to trials speaks far more about our faith than the actual outcomes do
    - Which is why Jesus wasn't concerned about the storm, but He was concerned about the disciples' response to the storm
    - He says they had insufficient faith because they were with Him, and they should have been enough
  - o And your trust in Jesus' love and good purpose is enough reason to see trials as opportunities to show your faith
    - We need to appreciate what our relationship with Jesus says about our life today and in the future
    - By faith we already possess something greater than anything to be found in this world...eternal life in a Kingdom to come
    - And so by that faith, we can face trials without concern
    - Because we know that no matter the outcome, we'll soon be in a new world where these things won't be remembered
  - Now obviously, we all experience human emotions in response to difficult circumstances...that's normal and expected
    - o Jesus never expected His disciples to feel nothing in the face of a trial
      - After all, even Jesus experienced emotions at times
      - He wept at Lazarus' death, for example
      - He experienced fear and anxiety in the Garden at the prospect of His own death
    - o But when it came time to act, Jesus always acted in keeping with faith in the Father, not out of emotion

- Though he mourned for Lazarus, He still waited three days to allow him die
- Though He was terrified over the pain of the cross, He still went forward despite His fears
- o Similarly, I don't believe Jesus expected His disciples to hide their emotions in that boat
  - But nor did He expect them to act out of fear but in keeping with their faith and knowledge of Him
  - Waking Jesus up and chastising Him for not bailing water was not a response driven by faith
  - It was a response of doubt and fear...it was insufficient faith
- o And that's the standard for every disciple...
  - It's OK to experience fear or doubt or sadness at times
  - Nevertheless, we know Jesus is with us in these moments, causing all things to work to good for those who love Him
  - And therefore, we counsel ourselves to act out of a heart of faith rather than out of ignorance or emotion
- But that kind of spiritual maturity doesn't come without effort
  - o That's precisely why the Lord brings us trials...because they expose the limits of our spiritual maturity and give us opportunity to grow
    - When we fail those tests, it's a sign to us that our faith in Jesus remains academic...
    - We understand Him in our heads yet we haven't allowed our knowledge of Him to influence how we experience the world
    - Our faith is still genuine, but it's impotent, immature
  - o Jesus expects His disciples to bring our feelings and perceptions into alignment with our knowledge of Him
    - So we can respond to life circumstances with eyes for eternity
    - As Paul says:

Col. 1:9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

Col. 1:10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Col. 1:11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously

Col. 1:12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

- o We must be filled with a knowledge of His good will so that we can understand His ways
  - And in understanding His ways, we may then walk in a manner that pleases Him
  - Strengthened in His might attaining steadfastness and patience and even joy in the face of trials
  - The ultimate demonstrate of faith in trial is giving thanks to the Father for the trials we experience
  - And we do that knowing it's qualifying us to share in an eternal inheritance
- So to conclude this miracle, we see Jesus stilling the waves
  - o He stands up and rebuked the waves
    - A rebuke is a censure or stern rebuff...the word in Greek literally means to muzzle
    - Rebuking a person causes that person to go silent
  - o And so it was with the storm
    - My Bible says the water was perfectly calm, but the phrase in Greek is actually "great calm"
    - The language indicates that the storm ceased instantaneously
    - One moment waves were chasing into the boat, the next instant, they were floating on a glassy sea
  - o Interestingly, Mark records Jesus asking His question a second time after the storm ceased

- He says again, "Why are you afraid?"
- I wonder how much more that question meant coming after the storm was completely gone?
- Because the answer is certainly obvious...they had no reason to be afraid
  - o Having witnessed the miracle, the disciples were amazed
    - Mark said they were fearful, but in the sense of awestruck
    - They ask one another even the wind and sea obey Him
  - As I said earlier, they clearly didn't expect this to happen
    - o But they asked Jesus to save them and He did
      - Do you see why you can remain at peace with trials
      - Because the Lord can stop the trial in an instant as soon as He desires
      - So every second it continues is a second of purpose
      - Make the most of that time to develop your spiritual maturity
    - o And then when the Lord is ready to bring it to an end, He can do it instantly
      - In fact, He can do it far better than you even dared to ask
      - Like the disciples who asked to be saved, and the entire lake became still
      - When you ask for relief and the Lord is ready to grant it, you can be sure His peace will come with the same power that brought the trial
      - As Paul says:

**Eph. 3:20** Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us,

**Eph. 3:21** to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.