

“Do not be afraid, for I am with you”

Matt. 8:23-27

Intro. One of the most wonderful and assuring promises is repeated about at least 16x's in the Bible. To people just like us the Lord says, **“Do not be afraid, for I am with you.”** The fact is, we're often worried and frightened...but we are never alone. We can never be separated from God's love or stray beyond His reach. But we often forget this...especially in crisis moments when circumstances seem hopelessly out of control. Theologically we may know God is with us. But when troubles come God sometimes seems distant, unconcerned, or fast asleep. Even though we follow Him faithfully, violent storms arise and we fear all is lost. In desperation, we send up simple prayers that seem so inadequate and ineffective. Then in a gentle way, the Lord rebukes our fears. With an awesome display of power, He rebukes the storm, whatever it is. Later when we calm down and our clothing dries out, we realize the trial was sent to strengthen our faith. We realize once again, that God in love and grace has brought us through. He allowed us to go through a storm...in fact, He sent the storm so we might know Him better and glorify Him all the more. We see this gracious pattern in the short story before us this morning. Unlike a typical sermon outline, I want to examine the details of the story itself, then consider the application...the principles the story illustrates.

1. Disciples and a Perilous Storm – vs. 23-27

Let's read **Matt. 8:23-27 - Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"**

As we've said many times, Matthew's purpose is to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that Jesus Christ is God's Messiah, the hope of Israel and Savior of the world. Prior to the record of this stormy event, Matthew has reported the authority of His teachings and His power over disease, deformity and demon possession. **8:16 - When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick.** Matthew sought to systematically prove the trustworthiness of the claim Jesus made in **28:18** where He said, **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.** Jesus proved He is a King who *“feels our pain”* but unlike other kings, He has the power and authority to remove it. In the verses before us we see His authority over a violent storm or the forces nature.

Now listen...throughout the Bible, the mighty power that stills raging storms is ascribed to God alone. So the question is this...*“Who is this fourth man in the furnace...Who is this in the boat with us?”*

- **Psa. 89: 8, 9 - O LORD God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O LORD, and your faithfulness surrounds you. You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them.**
- As we read a few moments ago, **Psa. 107: 28, 29 say, Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed.**

These Jewish men who followed Jesus should have known these Scriptures. They should have realized who was with them in the boat. Despite the ferocity of the storm, they should have known they were safe with Jesus on board. But they were no different than we are when something so unexpected and threatening arises. We forget the One who has promised to never leave or forsake us. We forget who Jesus is and whose we are. Yet God wastes nothing.

Like violent storms, trials come to strengthen and refine our faith. They're sent by God to demonstrate His grace for our growth and His glory.

v. 23 - Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Like our own Great Lakes, the Sea of Galilee is really a large fresh water lake 15 miles long and about 8 miles wide at its widest point. In 1986 when the water of Galilee was at an all time low, a 1st century fishing boat was discovered that may have been similar to the boat of **v.23**. Like the wrecks at the floor of the Great Lakes, this 2,000 year old boat was remarkably preserved by the fresh water of Galilee and is on display at a kibbutz near Capernaum. The boat measures 27 feet in length and nearly 8 feet wide and could have easily transported a dozen men. It may have looked like the boat in this second slide. According to Mark's version, **there were also other boats with Him. – Mk. 4:36** Some from the crowd apparently tagged along in smaller boats.

In the previous verses, Jesus spoke to two men about the cost of following him. Though both men turned back, His true disciples got into the boat. They followed Jesus. The fact that these believers **followed him - v.23** is the point of connection between this story and the section just before it. And make note of this...they followed Jesus right into a storm! Say what? Doesn't Jesus have some sort of early warning system to avoid situations like this?

Mark and Luke also point out that Jesus said, "**Let us go over to the other side of the lake.**" As we said last time, it was well into the evening when Jesus instructed his disciples to set sail from Capernaum to the region of Decapolis on the eastern shore of Galilee. The trip from one side to the other may have involved a distance of 10 or 12 miles in a southeasterly direction from Capernaum. And notice, Jesus said, "*let's go.*" But He never said anything about a storm or the extreme danger they would face during their journey from one side to the other. He simply said, "**Let's go...to the other side.**" As many have observed, this declaration should have been enough to inspire confidence and peace in the midst of the storm. I mean, He didn't say, "*Let's go swamp this boat and drown in the lake tonight.*" He said, "**Let's go over to the other side.**" In the same way, Jesus has promised every believer safe passage from death to life and from earth to heaven. **Jn. 5:24 - "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."** Is His word enough for you? Despite the storms that may come between here and there, are you confident you'll safely cross over?
Illus. Syrian pastor, wife and family.

v.24 - Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. The Greek word Matthew used to describe this furious storm is *seismos* from which we get seismograph or seismology. *Seismos* means a shaking or quaking. The word was typically used to describe an earthquake. Luke's account says, **A squall** (or tempest of wind) **came down on the lake – Lk. 8:23**. So an incident of strong wind whipped the lake into a fury. I've actually felt that chilling wind while standing on a 7th floor balcony of a hotel in Tiberius on the western shore. Come tonight to hear the whole story.

Now several of the disciples were veteran fishermen. They knew the lake. They had experience in rough seas. As fishermen, they recognized the signs which indicate a change in the weather. Yet none of them suspected a storm that night. Not one uttered a word of caution. No one said, "*I think we should wait until morning.*" This storm was completely unexpected. As **v.24** says, **It came without warning.** Its unwarranted speculation to say Satan sent the storm. We tend to blame the Devil for lots of bad stuff, but I think we give him too much credit. The storm reminds me of **Jonah 1:4 - Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.** Like Jonah's storm, the Lord had a plan and a good purpose for sending the wind.

The boat my brother and I share is only 16' 1". Whether brave or foolish, we take it out on Saginaw Bay and Lake Huron. We check the weather forecast and wave height before deciding to go out. While out there we pay attention the sky and changes in wind direction. Yet there's been a few times when the wind and waves have come up quickly. I don't think Tom knew this until now, but I've had waves crash over the bow...moments when I wondered if we'd have to surrender our little craft to Davey Jones locker and swim for shore. But far worse than an afternoon when the wind kicks up is being out there at night when you can't see the waves coming at you. That was the situation here. It was pitch black when **a furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat. - Mk. 4:37** Boats like mine are equipped with a self-bailing hull and flotation devices. We have cell phones an air horn and signal flares. But these guys had nothing like that. When a boat or ship broke up, those on board grabbed a plank and held on. Listen, God has ways to get our attention and few situations are as helpless and frightening as being in a small boat in a fierce storm.

W.M. Thomson in his book entitled, The Land and the Book, describes his own experience of having moor their boat on the shores of Galilee. He wrote...*"On the occasion referred to, we subsequently pitched our tents at the shore, and remained for three days and night exposed to this tremendous wind. We had to double pin all the tent ropes, and frequently were obliged to hang with our whole weight upon them to keep the quivering tabernacle from being carried up bodily into the air...The whole lake, as we had it, was lashed into fury; the waves repeatedly rolled up to our tent door, tumbling over the ropes with such violence as to carry away the tent pins. And moreover, these winds are not only violent, but they come down suddenly and often when the sky is perfectly clear."*

Located 600 feet below zero, the Sea of Galilee is geographically situated for violent storms. Near the north end of the Sea of Galilee is Mt. Hermon which rises to a height of 9,200 feet. Strong northerly winds cascade down from the mountain and pass through the upper Jordan valley with tremendous force. When these winds meet the warmer air over the Galilee basin with mountains rising on either side, they increase in a funneling effect. This topographical map shows how the geography generates such violent storms on Galilee. While all this is true, we really don't need a naturalistic explanation for the storm that arose that night. **Psa. 135:7 - He makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth; he sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses. Psa. 78:26** explains the miraculous Red Sea crossing in these terms...**He let loose the east wind from the heavens and led forth the south wind by his power.** And before this night ends, His disciples will come to realize that the wind and the waves obey the voice of Jesus Christ (**v.27**) and God's purpose was achieved.

Now we understand why God sent a storm in Jonah's situation. God commissioned him to go to Nineveh but Jonah went the opposite direction. He was a disobedient prophet. Yet with amazing creativity, **the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah (Jon. 1:17)**. That great fish was like a submarine sent not to punish him, but to save his life and turn him around. But the disciples hadn't disobeyed. They hadn't turned back when they heard the cost of discipleship...they followed Jesus right into a storm. And that seems to be the reason Matthew chose to put the story here. It follows the conversation with two men about the cost of discipleship. As we saw last time, it's an oxymoron to call Jesus **Lord** and in the same breath say, **first, let me...** If Jesus is Lord at all, He must be Lord of all. We must listen to His Word and obey His voice if He is King.

So we say, *"OK, I get that. To be His follower I must obey Him. But surely Jesus won't lead us into the heart of a raging storm!"* By way of this event, Matthew seems to say, *"Are you sure about that?"* To the unbelieving, this miracle demonstrates the authority of Jesus over the natural realm. The miracles serve as His divine credentials. Jesus does what only God can do. They prove Jesus is the King who has the power to bring to pass the ideal conditions of the promised Kingdom. But to the believing, this event says something more about discipleship. The false gospel many proclaim promises health, wealthy, smooth sailing and a happy life.

Yet here we see that following Jesus may lead us into a storm...and storms come in many forms and intensities. **Jas. 1:2, 3 - Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.** Storms represent the trials of life...circumstances that rock our world and test our faith. You see, the Lord's objective is to make us holy, not happy. Happiness is a byproduct of holiness, but holiness always comes first. Like a rock hammer, trials knock off rough edges and make us the people God wants us to be.

v.24b - But Jesus was sleeping. Do you know why Jesus was asleep? Simple question, simple answer. He was exhausted. He was so tired He laid his head on a cushion in stern of the boat. **(Mk. 4:38)** And Jesus slept through the howling wind / the heaving of the boat / the chilling spray of the waves / and the nervous babble of His disciples. Listen...whenever Jesus did something, He was all in. Nothing He did was partial or half-hearted...even sleeping. He was sound asleep. Don't you love to sleep that soundly? A fierce thunderstorm passes...trees are uprooted...power lines are down...and you slept like a baby. That's like the peace of God. The disciples were on "red alert," but Jesus wasn't anxious or even concerned. Our world is literally on fire, but God isn't up in heaven wringing His hands. The Bible describes the peace of God as a **peace which transcends all understanding – Phil. 4:7**. In other words, it's higher and deeper than the human mind can comprehend or figure out. Jesus consistently exhibited this kind of unearthly peace. Though He was sleeping, Jesus was there in the boat with them. He promised, **I will never leave you or forsake you**. With the Lord in our boat, we're safe. His presence in our lives makes all the difference.

Now in a time of trouble when our faith is being tested, does it ever seem that God is asleep? We pray and plead, yet no answer is forthcoming...nothing happens. We begin to wonder if He really cares. The disciples were no different. **Mk. 4:38 - The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"** At times like this it's helpful to be reminded of **Psa 121 - My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip-- he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD watches over you-- the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all harm-- he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.** Though the Lord may seem distant and unconcerned, it isn't that way at all. If His answer is delayed, it's for a good reason. So don't give up...don't stop praying. Sometimes the Lord answers with a "yes" / sometimes with a "no" / and at other times His answer is "not now, but later." On still other occasions He will correct our request to bring it into conformity with His will. In each case, our prayers are heard and God's answer is best.

v.25 - The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" In the Greek language, the disciple's prayer consists of just three words...so much for long drawn out prayers! Sometimes, "*help Lord*" is all we have time for. And it's enough! The disciples were slow learners, but they were learning. They were learning to depend on the Lord. Desperate times call for desperate measures. And that's all prayer is for many people. It takes time plus experience for us to learn we must bring everything to the Lord.

I heard the story of a military commander who was an avowed atheist. Caught in the middle of a horrific fire fight with mortar shells exploding all around him, he was heard crying out for God to save him. Later his men asked if he had changed his views about God. He said, "*No I haven't. But there ought to be a god for a state of affairs like that!*"

v.26 - He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. For the past year, the disciples had witnessed Jesus perform many miracles. By now they should have been convinced of who He is.

But all they had witnessed hadn't sunk in yet. If they really understood who was in the boat with them, they would have faced the storm fearlessly. In Jesus' reply we find the purpose for the storm. The storm was sent to test and to strengthen their faith. That's what the storms of life do. They test our faith to see how sturdy it is. They test our response. But at this point, their faith was small and weak. They were right to ask the Lord to save them. And their request showed they believed He could save them. But the fear and sense of panic they exhibited, betrayed the weakness of their faith.

I love the next sentence. **Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.** Just like His miracles of healing, the results were instantaneous. When a blow like this ends, a lake the size of Galilee takes hours to settle down. But when Jesus rebuked the wind and waves, the lake was completely calm. A certain liberal theologian who dared to put his unbelief in print, points out how incredibly lucky it was that Jesus woke up just as the wind began to die down. Instead of a miracle of power over the forces of nature, he writes it off as a matter of lucky timing. Truth be known, Jesus was incredibly "lucky" wherever he went! In this chapter alone, a leper went into instant spontaneous remission at precisely the right moment. Then without explanation, the centurion's servant just happened to suddenly recover the moment Jesus said, **"It will be done."** And Peter's mother in law, though racked with fever and weakness, jumped out of bed to serve Jesus and her guests when Jesus touched her hand. Now that's what I call terrific timing! This liberal scholar illustrates that the issue isn't that people can't believe...it's that they choose not to believe!

Finally, **v.27 - The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"** Here we see that God's purpose for sending the storm was accomplished. The disciples were **amazed**. The experience that night opened their eyes to see Jesus as He is and to realize they are safe when He is with them. Mission accomplished! God achieved His purpose. He wants us to know Him, trust Him and rest in His love. He's completely worthy of that. So let's end by considering the principles we can claim from this story.

2. Disciples and an All-Powerful Savior

To be Christ's disciple is to be a learner. In **Matt. 11:28, 29** Jesus said, **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.** This rest that Jesus promises isn't just for those brief interludes when our lives are trouble free. The rest He calls us to experience is rest in the storm. Are you being thrown about in the midst of a storm right now – circumstances that are frightening and out of your control? Then learn the lessons from this story. Put embrace these seven principles:

- (1) Don't be surprised that when you follow Jesus faithfully, you still find yourself in the midst of a storm you didn't see coming. Storms are part of God's plan for your growth and His glory.
- (2) Be confident that, even if it seems like He is asleep, the Spirit of Christ is still there in the storm with you. He knows what is going on; and He is able to do whatever is needed.
- (3) Remember to cry out to Him. Prayer is our greatest resource in a storm. Don't be silent and stuff it in...pray! Tell the Lord what concerns you.
- (4) Be courageous and trust the Lord in the midst of the storm. Don't be timid or cowardly because of a lack of faith. God loves you and will never abandon you. He may choose to correct your unbelief before He rebukes the storm.

(5) Rest assured in the knowledge that Jesus has power to still a raging storm whenever He sees fit to do so.

(6) Watch, and learn from Him. Through the storm He wants to teach you that He is sovereign over every dimension of our lives; and that even wind and waves must obey the commands of your greatest Friend.

(7) And don't miss this final point...When the storm is over, and the Lord proves His faithfulness to you once again, worship Him!