

“YOU OF LITTLE FAITH, WHY ARE YOU SO AFRAID?”

Matthew 8:18-34

Key Verse 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.”

The previous Bible passage emphasized Jesus’ healing ministry: Jesus healed a man with leprosy, a centurion’s servant, Peter’s mother-in-law, and many sick and demon-possessed people. This fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy, **“He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases.”**

In today’s Bible passage, we want to learn more about Jesus: more about being a disciple of Jesus, more of Jesus’ divine power and identity, more of Jesus’ saving grace and healing mercy. Especially, as disciples of Jesus Christ, let’s learn that Jesus wants us to have faith that overcomes fear. Lord, save us and have mercy on us.

First, there is a cost to be Jesus’ disciple (18-22). Look at verse 18. Crowds continued to throng around Jesus. Some wanted healing. Some came to hear him. The more Jesus preached and healed, the more people kept coming to Jesus. It was endless work. When Jesus saw the crowd, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. There is a time to engage in the work and a time to retreat. Jesus was exhausted and he wanted some personal private time with his disciples on the other side of the lake.

Look at verse 19. At that moment, a teacher of the law came to Jesus and said, **“Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.”** This teacher of the law was unusual. Most of the teachers of the law were not very friendly toward Jesus. Rather, they felt threatened by Jesus’ ministry and offended by Jesus’ teachings. But this teacher of the law volunteered to follow Jesus anywhere. Maybe he regarded himself as Jesus’ #1 fan. Obviously, this teacher of the law really liked Jesus’ teaching. In fact, he called Jesus, **“Teacher.”** Jesus indeed was a teacher, the greatest teacher in human history. We might think that Jesus would praise or compliment this man saying, “Cool! Come along!” But that is not what Jesus said to him.

Look at verse 20. Jesus replied, **“Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”** Why did Jesus suddenly talk about foxes and birds and a place to stay? Perhaps this man expected that by

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expressing his desire to follow Jesus anywhere, Jesus would automatically take care of his room and board as his disciple. After all, he was committing himself to travel with Jesus full time wherever Jesus went. Even at that moment, they were about to get into a boat and go across the lake. Maybe the man thought it sounded fun and adventurous. “Wow, Jesus! Can I come along?” I’m just guessing based on Jesus’ words to him.

Basically, Jesus told him that there would be no Hilton reservation where he was going. Not even a Motel 6. He might be sleeping under the stars under an oak tree or in a barn somewhere. Following Jesus is not what you want to sign up for if you are seeking a comfortable, easy, wealthy or luxurious life. Jesus doesn’t promise these things to his followers. Following Jesus doesn’t include free lodging and meals. Rather, one can expect much sacrifice and hard work to follow Jesus.

Why would anyone be willing to sign up for that? They would do so if they were seeking treasure in heaven, eternal life and the true meaning and fulfillment of life. Jesus wanted this man to know what he was volunteering for. Jesus wanted him to know that there is a cost in following Jesus, that is, in pursuing God’s kingdom and righteousness. We don’t know what this teacher of the law decided: whether to follow Jesus or go back home to his mommy.

Then another disciple said to Jesus, **“Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”** This man was a disciple or student of Jesus. He called Jesus **“Lord,”** which was proper and correct. One thing we don’t know is whether the man’s father had already died or not. It would be very strange if his father had just died, for he should be busy making funeral arrangements. But it’s possible that his father had died, for he is called a disciple, and might feel he needed special permission from Jesus. More likely, however, his father was old and he didn’t actually know how much longer he would live. So his words might’ve actually meant, “I’ll follow you later, but I can’t right now. Give me some time. I’ve got more important things to tend to, namely, showing proper respect to my parents.”

One of the Ten Commandments is **“Honor your father and your mother.”** That was very important in that Jewish society. Jesus understood that. Even so, Jesus told him something a bit shocking in verse 22, **“Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”** Jesus was often saying surprising, shocking and unexpected things to make a point. Then what was his point?

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Whenever we want to decide to do something for God, there are usually many excuses to prevent us from doing so. This man suggested to Jesus what he needed to do first. He was a student but he was telling his Teacher his own priorities that he needed to tend to first. He said, **“First let me go...”**

He is like a person who says, “I will follow you Lord, but first let me finish college,” or, “first let me get married,” or, “first let me get a good full time salary job, not an hourly wage part time job.” The list is endless. We can always find what we think are good reasons to do something first before following Jesus. But these are merely reasons to procrastinate and not follow Jesus right now. “Lord, I’ll start tithing when I make a good salary.” “Lord, I’ll share God’s word with someone when I get more knowledge of the Bible,” “Lord, I’ll invite someone to church or Bible study when I get to know them better, like next year some time.”

Jesus said, **“Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”** In context, those who are dead are those who put their families as their first priority in life. I’m not saying a person’s family is not important, but it is not the most important thing or relationship. Our relationship with God is to be most important. Listening to and following Jesus Christ is to be first in the life of a sincere follower of Jesus Christ.

Let me ask you a challenging question: “What do you spend most of your free time listening to or watching or reading, and how closely is it related to God, the Bible, or Jesus? I confess that I’ve probably spent more time this year watching Youtube videos of talent shows, sports and comedians than I have spent reading my Bible. So I’m way behind in my Bible reading schedule for this year. I admit that such an attitude does not qualify me well as a sincere, dedicated disciple of Jesus. May God give us all grace to shift our first priority to following Jesus Christ.

I’m always impressed by friends who, by their own free will, spend much time attending Bible studies or listening to sermons, rather than doing or listening to other things. Jesus calls us to follow him. How well are you following Jesus?

Second, a storm provides a lesson in faith and a show of God’s power through Jesus (23-27). This next episode is the first of Jesus’ miracles over nature, namely the winds and the waves of the sea. Jesus got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Jesus’ disciples are not those who merely make big boasts or who make excuses, but they are those who actually get into the boat and go where Jesus goes or wants them to go. They follow him.

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Look at verse 24. Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The Sea of Galilee was 13 miles long and 8 miles wide. It was a puny lake compared to Lake Michigan. Even so, dangerous storms could suddenly come up on the lake. One of these storms suddenly threatened their lives. It was serious enough that four experienced fishermen among the disciples couldn't handle it.

But Jesus was sleeping. What does this tell us about Jesus? It tells us that Jesus was exhausted from serving the crowds, through his preaching and healing. Jesus was not superman. Jesus was fully human. He had to sleep. It also shows us that Jesus could sleep through a storm. Someone said that Jesus must've been a deep sleeper, so that even a storm couldn't wake him! But it tells us something more about Jesus. Jesus had peace and no fear in his heart. Perhaps the rocking of the boat helped Jesus to sleep better! With Jesus Christ in our hearts, we can have peace in the midst of storms.

The disciples were not so peaceful. They were quite realistic. They went and woke Jesus saying, “**Lord, save us! We're going to drown!**” This storm was not a small matter. It was a matter of life or death. They couldn't do a thing to control it. So they ran to Jesus for help. It's good for us to run to Jesus in prayer. But they depended on the man Jesus rather than exercising their own faith in their Father God, who cares about them and knows what's going on.

Jesus spoke to his disciples, saying, “**You of little faith, why are you so afraid?**” This is the second time in Matthew's gospel that Jesus said, “you of little faith.” The first time was in 6:30 when Jesus said, “**will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?**” In that example, Jesus said they needed more faith to overcome worry. Here, Jesus teaches his disciples that they need more faith to overcome fear.

We see that faith overcomes fear. Faith in God Almighty enabled the boy David to challenge the giant Goliath. Faith enables people to overcome impossible odds. Faith gives people peace in the midst of storms. John Wesley was on a ship sailing across the Atlantic Ocean to America with some German Moravian Christians. The Germans were worshipping when a storm hit their ship. Wesley entered into his journal, dated Sunday, Jan.25, 1736:

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In the midst of the psalm wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the main-sail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks, as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sung on. I asked one of them afterwards, “Was you not afraid?” He answered, “I thank God, no.” I asked, “But were not your women and children afraid?” He replied, mildly, “No; our women and children are not afraid to die.”¹

Faith in Jesus gave these German Moravian Christians peace in the midst of a severe storm. May we also have grace and peace in the time of storms.

Jesus did not just speak to his disciples and give them a lesson in faith. He also displayed the divine power of God. Jesus got up, rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

Thus far, Jesus had performed personal miracles to heal the sick and to drive out demons. This miracle was in a different category and scale. The winds and the waves were much bigger than any man. They were thought to be controlled by God. Meteorologists can explain to us the shifts in weather due to air fronts coming from the oceans or the poles. They know well about the weather, but they can't control it.

With a rebuke, Jesus exercised divine control of the storm. Jesus didn't have to pray. He rebuked the storm and it became completely calm. Have you ever desperately needed a change in the weather, such as for safety purposes, and asked God to change it? Try it some time. We cannot change the weather. But God can. It's a small thing for God to do. What is too big for us is not too big for God. So when you're feeling small, up against a giant or a task too big to handle, look at God in faith, the God who is much bigger than our storm or giant or problem or task. It pleases God to act on our behalf when we depend on him humbly yet in faith.

How did the disciples respond? They responded very realistically, like any ordinary person would respond today: they were amazed and asked each other, **“What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”** The

¹ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-1/moravians-and-john-wesley.html>

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Bible is not an exaggerated story. Jesus calmed the stormy sea right before their eyes.

Third, Jesus drives out violent demons into a herd of pigs (28-34).

When they arrived at the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, in Gentile territory, they were met by two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs. While Mark and Luke mention one man, Matthew mentions two. Perhaps one of the two men was a more serious case or the primary spokesman of the two. They came from the tombs, a lonely and scary place, surrounded by death. They were so violent that no one could pass them. Maybe they were like barking dogs, “Get out of here! This is our turf!”

Look at verse 29. They shouted, **“What do you want with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?”** They accurately knew who Jesus was, the Son of God. And they were extremely afraid of Jesus who would judge them one day at the appointed time. But the demons or evil spirits in these men tried to convince these men that Jesus was bad for them—that Jesus wanted to harm them. Actually, Jesus wanted to save and free them from the devil’s hold on their lives.

The demons sensed they were in big trouble. They saw a large herd of pigs feeding on a hillside and they begged Jesus, **“If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs.”** They wanted to make a deal with Jesus. Jesus didn’t hesitate but spoke just one word: **“Go!”** and the demons came out and went into the pigs. The pigs couldn’t handle the evil spirits inside them. So, in a self-destructive action, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water. Then those tending the pigs ran off, went into the town and reported all this, including what had happened to the demon-possessed men. The whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.

The people were not happy that the demon-possessed men were helped. They rather freaked out to see all the dead pigs. They were afraid of the power of Jesus. So they pleaded with Jesus to leave their region. To the people, these tormented souls were not worth the large herd of pigs. But to Jesus they were worth it. Jesus did not hesitate to send the evil spirits into the pigs. To Jesus, one soul is worth more than many pigs.

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Jesus was willing to pay a higher price than pigs to save us from our sins. He was willing to die on the cross for us. This is the amazing love of God for us. Sometimes when we look at ourselves, we don't feel worth saving. Or when we look at others, especially violent or hardened criminals, they don't look worth saving to us. But Jesus loves them and wants to save them. Jesus even died for them.

Today we saw Jesus' divine power to calm a stormy sea, and his divine authority to command many demons out of two men into a large herd of pigs. We also learned that it is not easy or comfortable to follow Jesus. Most of all, we learned that faith in Jesus overcomes the fear of death. When we feel afraid or overwhelmed, we need to hear Jesus' words, **“You of little faith, why are you so afraid?”**