

JESUS CALMS A STORM: CONQUERING FEAR AND NATURE

MATHEW 08:23–27

Introduction: Messiah, Messiahship

What was the purpose of this experience? Why was a storm allowed to arise on the sea with Christ in the boat? The answer is given in v. 27. And what a marvellous purpose it was: to stir His people to ask, “What kind of man is this?” He proved again that He is the Messiah! Calming the storm did three things.

1. It demonstrated who He is: the Sovereign Lord who has all power — even power over nature.
2. It strengthened the belief of His followers: belief in Him as the Messiah and in His personal care as their Saviour.
3. It gave to all generations a picture of His care and power — His care and power to deliver through all the storms of life (trials and fearful experiences).

It does not matter what the storm or trial is nor how terrifying it may be, Christ is able to deliver and bring about the most assuring calm. Few trials could be as terrifying as being caught in a life-threatening storm at sea. In this experience, God demonstrated His wonderful care and power to deliver believers through the storms of life.

- I. A basic fact: true disciples follow Him no matter what (v. 23).
- II. A fearful experience: a great storm (v. 24).
- III. A terrifying discovery: man is not able to handle the situation (v. 24).
- IV. A desperate approach: Lord, awake — save us (v. 25).
- V. A challenging question (v. 26).
- VI. A strong, powerful deliverance: a great calm (v. 26).
- VII. A marvellous purpose (v. 27).

I. *Mathew 08:23 Discipleship and Self-denial*

A basic fact — true disciples follow Jesus no matter what. The words “His disciples followed Him” are significant. His disciples followed Him wherever He went. They had made a genuine commitment; they were now committed to following Him regardless of the circumstances and the cost. We have some idea of the sacrifice His disciples made through a glimpse into Peter’s family (Mt. 8:14-17). Remember, Peter and the others had left home, seldom to return, at least for any length of time. Just imagine the cost, the enormous sacrifice it was for them and their families!

Luke 9:23-24 Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”

Luke 14:33 *“In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”*

Rom 8:13 *For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

Phil 3:8 *What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.*

Thought 1. How many are willing to follow Jesus regardless of circumstances, cost, and the sacrifice demanded?

Mat 10:37-38 *“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”*

Thought 2. Not everyone follows Jesus. It was only a short distance around the lake (twelve miles) and only eight miles across. Jesus could have easily walked around the lake, but He chose to go by sea in order to rest and to share this experience with the disciples. But note: there is nothing said about the crowds following Him now, not like they were following after the Sermon on the Mount (8:1). Why were they not following?

- 1) The extra distance? (The effort required to follow Jesus was just too demanding.)
- 2) The potentially dangerous storms as one journeyed? (The journey to follow Jesus involved too many storms of abuse and ridicule, persecution and questions.)
- 3) The cost of passage? (The cost of following Jesus required too much sacrifice, the denial of too many creature comforts.)
- 4) The unbelief and dislike of His miracles and claims?

II. Mathew 08:24 Trials, Trouble and Afflictions

A fearful experience — a great storm arose. This was a most fearful experience; the apostles' very lives were threatened (v. 25). The waves were covering the boat (v. 24). It was, so to speak, a trial of trials. If Jesus could teach them His care through this experience, they would know He could take care of them through any storm or trial.

Note three things.

1. The storm arose immediately, unexpectedly: “Without warning.”
2. The storm was great: the waves were covering the boat.
3. The storm was life-threatening: “We’re going to drown!” (v. 25).

Job 5:7 *Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.*

Job 14:1 *“Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.”*

Psa 116:3 *The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow.*

Eccl 2:23 *All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless.*

Jer 8:15 *We hoped for peace but no good has come, for a time of healing but there was only terror.*

Thought 1. We face many storms throughout life, fearful storms (see note, Mt.7:24-25 for a list of the storms of life).

- 1) Some storms swoop down upon us totally unexpectedly. There is no warning, no sign of their coming. But they come, and as long as we follow Jesus, they will come.
- 2) Some storms are great. Their waves and repercussions slash against us. They overwhelm us and threaten to engulf us.
- 3) Some are life-threatening. We see no escape, no way out, no deliverance. There seems to be no way to carry on, not in the present circumstances.

Thought 2. Nature itself can appear calm and secure; it can seem serene and safe. But its storms can arise quickly, unexpectedly. Some persons are frightened by the storm's billowing clouds rolling in upon one another, the roar of thunder, the flash of lightening, and the torrent of rain. It is dangerous and life-threatening to anyone who is not sheltered and protected.

The picture is also true with some of the trials of life — trials which everyone has or will have. What we need is the shelter and protection of Jesus Christ Himself.

MARK 01:16

SEA OF GALILEE — LAKE GENNESARET — SEA OF TIBERIAS

A fresh water lake in northern Palestine. At its widest points, it was only about 13 miles north to south and 8 miles east to west. It would not be called a sea today because of its small size. There are several important facts to note about the Lake.

1. The Lake was known by several names: the Sea of Galilee (Mt. 4:18; 15:29; Mk. 1:16; 7:31); the Sea of Tiberias (Jn. 6:1; 21:1); the Lake of Gennesaret (Lk. 5:1); and simply the "lake" (Jn. 6:16-25) or "the water's edge" (Lk. 5:2). In the Old Testament it was called the Sea of Kinnereth (meaning harp shaped) (Lk. 8:22; Jn. 6:16-25; Num. 34:11; Deu. 3:17; Jos. 13:27).
2. The Lake was surrounded by some of the richest and most heavily populated areas of Palestine. Large towns flourished along its shores, towns which play a prominent role in Scripture: Capernaum (Mt. 4:12-13), Bethsaida (Mk. 6:45), Khorazin (Lk. 10:13), Magadan (Mt. 15:39), the region of Gerasenes (Mk. 5:1).
3. The Lake was subject to violent storms. It sat 680 feet below sea level which gave the Lake a warm climate, but it was in a pocket-like basin surrounded by steep, fast-rising hills (2000 feet high) and funnel-like mountains. The funnels

or deep ravines running down through the mountains have resulted from eons of erosion. When cold-fronts move in with their fierce winds, the cold whips through the funnel-like gorges and mixes with the warm temperatures of the Lake. Unpredictable and terrifying storms result (Mt. 8:23-27; Mk. 4:35-41; Lk. 8:22-25). □

III. *Mathew 08:24 Helplessness, Weakness*

A terrifying discovery — man is not able to handle the situation. The terrifying discovery was twofold.

1. They, the seasoned and self-confident fishermen, were unable to handle this particular storm. Note these facts about the disciples and the storm.
 - a. They were seasoned fishermen. They knew the sea and the boat; they knew how to handle themselves in the midst of any situation or trial. The same is true with many of us. We are seasoned at living and in handling the storms of life. We feel that no trial or situation can swoop down upon us beyond our control. We are completely self-sufficient, or so we think and feel.
 - b. They were face to face with a storm so severe that they were not able to save themselves. No doubt they had faced storms before, but they had never confronted a situation as terrifying as this severe storm. Everyone of us will face a *storm that terrifies* us some day. The *terrifying storm* will be beyond our control. We will not be able to save ourselves.
 - c. They were frightened and terrified. They were completely helpless and hopeless, left to themselves. When the terrifying storm hits us, it will leave us fearful, helpless, and hopeless.
 - d. They apparently had tried to handle the storm without Jesus until the situation got out of control (see v. 25). This, of course, is the root of the problem in many of our situations: lack of trust and faith in Christ and failing to call upon Him soon enough to prevent desperation.
2. They were without the immediate help of Jesus. To them, He was asleep. Jesus was present, yet He seemed so far away; He seemed asleep. He was out of reach, unaware of their desperate plight, unconscious of their need — so the disciples thought. How often our lack of trust and sin cause us to feel that the Lord is unaware and out of reach and untouched by our need.

2 Chr 20:12 “O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.”

Psa 127:1 Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.

Jer 10:23 *I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps.*

John 3:27 *To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven."*

John 15:5 *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*

Rom 7:18 *I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*

2 Cor 3:5 *Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.*

IV. Mathew 08: 25 Seeking God

A desperate approach — Lord, awake — save us. Why did the disciples call upon Jesus now? Why not earlier?

⇒ The situation was totally *out of control*, beyond their ability to handle.

⇒ They were about to perish and die.

⇒ They had waited and waited, tried and tried to handle the situation themselves. They were prideful men: big, sturdy, capable, seasoned, and prideful in their profession. They had always handled every situation before; they could handle this one, or so they thought.

In the final analysis, the disciples confessed their need. They broke through their pride and came to Jesus. But note: they had almost waited too late, humanly speaking (vv. 24-25). Jesus *stirred Himself* and heard their confession.

Thought 1. Note these significant lessons.

- 1) Imminent danger can drive us to Christ, but we need to remember three critical things.
 - a) We can't wait too long. We can die and slip into eternity before we know it.
 - b) We run a terrible risk in waiting. We overlook something: a person who decides to wait until the last minute is not all that sincere about Christ, and Christ knows it.
 - c) We waste a lifetime of *living* — *really living in all the fullness of life*. Abundant life comes only through Christ — the life that brings unbelievable confidence and assurance, security and self-worth, love and joy, peace and rest.

John 10:10 *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."*

Gal 5:22-23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

- 2) There is one ingredient so often missed in asking Christ to save us — one ingredient that determines whether we are heard or not: a true sense of need — a desperate plea for help beyond ourselves — a crying out to the Lord Himself — a diligent seeking.

Heb 11:6 *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

- 3) Their cry included the steps necessary for Christ to save them and us.

- a) They believed He could save them: so they came to Him.

John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

- b) They confessed their need to be saved, that they were perishing.

Rom 3:23 *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

Rom 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

- c) They cried out in desperation for Christ to save them.

Rom 10:13 *For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

Rom 10:9-10 *That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*

- 4) A desperate cry that will not quit will awaken the Lord to our need. No matter what it may be, persevering in prayer will awaken Him and bring the answer (see Mt. 7:7-11).

Mat 7:7-8 *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”*

Acts 17:27 *God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.*

Deu 4:29 *But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul.*

Psa 34:6 *This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles.*

Psa 61:2 *From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I.*

Psa 105:4 *Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.*

Isa 55:6 *Seek the Lord while he may be found: call on him while he is near.*

Jer 29:13 *You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*

V. *Mathew 08:26 Fear and Unbelief*

A challenging question. The disciples were going through two human experiences, but *they were aware of only one*, the experience of terrible fear. What they failed to see was completely hidden to them. They were experiencing the root cause of fear: little faith. Their trust in Christ (that their lives were completely in His keeping and under His care) was lacking. Their trust was incomplete and immature. They were not sure that He was aware of their desperate need. But He was, just as He is aware of all needs — always. He was the One who asked, ‘Why are you so afraid?’ It was as though He was shocked at their lack of faith. (See *Fear*, Mt. 8:26.)

Mat 17:20 He replied, “Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”

Mark 9:23 “‘If you can?’” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.”

Eph 6:16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Heb 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

James 1:5-6 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

Thought 1. Note several lessons.

- 1) Christ was not disturbed with their calling and interrupting His sleep. He was disturbed with their fear and lack of trust. He is never disturbed with our crying out to Him.
- 2) There is no excuse for a disciple’s fear. Of all people, believers are supposed to be the persons trusting Him, knowing that He is looking after their lives. Believers are to know His supernatural strength; they are supposed to walk through all things courageously, even death.
- 3) The disciples neglected Christ. They could have prevented much of their problem if they had gone to Christ earlier. As pointed out earlier, they were trying to handle the situation by themselves, confident of their own ability. How often we walk in self-confidence, not paying enough attention to the Lord and His care. We *always* need to be calling upon Him, not waiting until the last moment, expecting Him to step in and meet our emergency (1 Pet. 5:7; Eph. 6:18).
- 4) Christ rebukes fear and unbelief. Fear and unbelief dishonour Him. It says to the world that Christ is not enough. He is not strong enough and does not care enough

and does not love enough to look after us in our trouble and sin. How foolish we are (Jn. 3:16; 1 Pet. 5:7; Mt. 11:28-30)!

5) Faith is to be several things.

=> Faith is to be the foundation of our lives, not a beam for emergency support.

=> Faith is to be the flow of our behaviour, not the serum for emergencies.

=> Faith is to be the permeating thought of our mind, not the sporadic thought aroused by need. Faith is to be the constant plea of our heart, not the occasional cry of desperation.

6) Storms and trials can lead to terrible discouragement and fear...

- fear that one has gone too far for recovery.
- fear that no one really cares.
- fear that one is a stumbling block and a burden to others.
- fear that there is no real reason for living.

But there is hope — *in Christ*. He is *The Great Deliverer* from fear. In fact, He is *The Great Deliverer* from all trials and temptations.

Mat 28:20 *“And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Heb 13:5 *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”*

1 Cor 10:13 *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

Rev 2:10 *Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

Psa 23:4 *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

Psa 27:1 *The Lord is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life — of whom shall I be afraid?*

MATHEW 08:26 FEAR

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.

Mathew 08:26

Fear can be a good thing as well as a bad thing. Fear sometimes causes us to respond with more vigour and strength, intelligence and wisdom, well beyond ourselves. Fear can make us face three things.

1. Fear can make us face the reality about ourselves: what we really are; who we really are: why we are here.
2. Fear can make us face our desperate need: that we are not perfect nor completely self-sufficient, self-contained, or adequate for all things. We are not the summit of existence nor the epitome of what man should be. Humanism and humanistic philosophy (that man is all) are not the crowning glory of behaviour and thought. We desperately need to face the fact. No matter how well we behave or how high we think, we still have terrible storms that swoop down upon us, and they engulf us like waves of the ocean rolling in one upon another. And then the final wave that no man can handle, the great tidal wave of death, drowns the breath of life out of us. We must face the fact...

- *that there are desperate needs that must be handled.*
- *that we are incapable of handling them ourselves.*

3. Fear can make us face our need for help beyond ourselves.

In facing death we are as helpless as the disciples were. We cannot stop death. When it is time, we die. Note this fact as well: just like the disciples, we need help all the time. We may not confess our need, but the *need for Christ* is always hounding us whether we recognize it or not. We may walk day by day in our own strength and ability, but there would be a tremendous difference if we trusted Christ to save us.

1. Things would go much better.

Rom 8:28 *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

2. Life would be so much more smooth and more peaceful.

John 10:10 *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”*

John 14:27 *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

John 16:33 *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

3. Life would bear so much more fruit.

Gal 5:22-23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

4. Assurance and confidence and hope would flood our hearts and minds so much more.

Rom 5:5 *And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (see 5:1-5)*

2 Tim 4:6-8 *For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

1 John 2:28 *And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.*

1 John 3:21 *Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God. □*

VI. Mathew 08:26 Jesus Christ, the Sovereign Lord

A strong, powerful deliverance — a great calm. Christ is the Sovereign Lord over all nature. He can do what He wills for any of us. He arose and rebuked the storm — then there was an instantaneous calm. But note this: the disciples misread both the situation and Christ's presence. When they awoke Christ, Christ pointed out their fear immediately — even before He arose and answered their need.

This says something of critical importance: all the problems of the world are known by Christ and providentially overruled by Him. He does not have to rush to meet them. Problems are not a danger or threat to the child of God. This does not mean that we shall not suffer or die, nor that we do not have to bear terrible trials. The disciples had to experience this storm and they had to experience many other storms. But Christ was with them, and He is always with us. He will strengthen and carry us through all the storms of life. In fact, as with the disciples, God uses the storms of life to teach us more and more trust in Him. If there were no trials, there would be no need to trust Him.

How often we misread the presence of Christ, thinking He is out of reach. And how often we misread the storm, thinking it is out of His control. The problem is, we are not walking close enough to Him to be conscious of His presence and care. He will speak and calm the storm at the very best time, after everyone has learned what they are supposed to learn through the storms.

Mat 19:26 *Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

Mat 28:18 *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."*

Luke 1:37 *"For nothing is impossible with God."*

Job 26:12 *By his power he churned up the sea; by his wisdom he cut Rahab to pieces.*

Psa 115:3 *Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.*

Isa 43:13 *“Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?”*

Thought 1. Christ arises when He is called upon. When we really mean what we pray. He arises to His feet in our behalf. He stands and confronts the situation head-on, meeting our needs beyond what we ask, in the very best way possible.

Rom 8:26 *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.*

Eph 3:20 *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.*

Thought 2. Note two things.

- 1) Christ can calm any storm of life for us.
- 2) Christ can strengthen us to go through any storm of life.

2 Cor 1:3-4 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.*

Phil 1:29 *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.*

1 Pet 4:12-13 *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*

VII. Mathew 08:27 Power

A marvellous purpose. The disciples marvelled; they had never seen anything like it — even the winds and seas obeyed Him. (See Mt. 8:23-27.)

1. They now knew more about what it meant to call Him “Lord.” He was the sovereign Lord who possessed all power over nature — the same power that the prophets of old proclaimed for God.
2. They also knew more about what it meant to trust Him and His Word. He was able to control even the elements of nature. They could now depend upon His power to do whatever was needed. In Him, the power was available to control all things and to do all things.

John 14:12 *“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”*

Eph 3:20 *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.*

Phil 2:9-12 *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence — continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.*

2 Tim 1:7 *For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. ■*