

LESSON 2 • JUNE 13, 2021

WHY ARE YOU AFRAID?

Lesson Scripture: Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25

Focus Scripture: Matthew 8:23-27

Key Verse: *He said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?"*

Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm. Matthew 8:26 (NRSV)

MATTHEW 8:23-27 (NRSV)

23 And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him.

24 A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep.

25 And they went and woke him up, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!"

26 And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm.

27 They were amazed, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"

MATTHEW 8:23-27 (KJV)

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!

INTRODUCTION

The first lesson looked at a powerful teaching by Jesus Christ. This lesson also deals with power. This time it is a display of authority over the storm of rough winds and raging water. The storm occurred on the Sea of Galilee. But, no doubt, as you follow the discussion, you will reflect on the symbolic storms people face in their Christian walk. In this regard, consider to whom you look for help in times of calamities. Also, think about the emotions that grip you in life's storms. Does fear overwhelm you, or do you maintain strong confidence in God's ability to deliver you? And what assurances do you have that despite the fierceness of life's storms, you will make it to the other side: to eternal life, with the Savior?

What the disciples faced in that storm experience with Jesus had a profound effect on their lives and ministry. We can safely say they were never the same again. They saw Jesus in a new light. I invite us to consider the effects of life's storms on our view of God. Sadly, storm situations have broken some people and sent them running away from the church. But storms can and should drive us into closer fellowship with God and other believers. Mature believers

recognize that God is still our best option for protection in life's storms. The Sea of Galilee storm blew the disciples closer to God and gave them more powerful testimonies. What does your storm experiences do for your relationship with God?

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

If we read the story in the text in a casual manner, we see a simple storm-rescue. Such a simple view might tempt us to compare the situation with other storm rescues we have seen, maybe in media like National Geographic or The Weather Channel. But there was nothing simple about the events given in the Gospels. To prove this, we retell the story in English with the intensity the original language permits. *One day Jesus invited his close disciples on a boat-ride with him to do ministry on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. We should note that the disciples were veteran fishermen who were familiar with the Sea of Galilee. They had ridden out many storms in their years on the sea.*

The trip started calmly like prior voyages on that gigantic lake. The disciples saw no signs of an imminent storm. So, Jesus found a comfortable position in the boat and went to sleep.

When the boat was about half-way across the sea, a raging storm arose. This storm was worse than any other storm the fishermen had endured before. They were terrified. They stared destruction and death in the face. So, in desperation, the disciples frantically shouted to Jesus at the top of their voices. They awoke Jesus and asked him to do something about the wild storm. They saw Jesus as their only

hope out of the terrible ordeal.

Jesus awoke. He was not pleased. He blasted the disciples for their faithlessness. Were they shocked? They wondered what exactly Jesus expected them to do in such a deadly storm. While they stood on the deck in shock, Jesus calmly turned to the sea and by mere words commanded the sea and wind to behave calmly. As soon as the words left Jesus' mouth, the storm stopped. The terrified disciples were speechless. Jesus, whom they were with day and night, by mere words commanded the sea and wind. And the elements obeyed. They had never seen or heard about anything like that before.

The experience drove the disciples to one conclusion – Jesus is a special man with mystical powers. In fact, he had to be whom he claimed to be. These events boosted their view of Jesus, increased their trust in him, and enhanced their testimony of Christ to the world. Yes, despite the traumatic experience, the disciples came out with a deeper admiration of Jesus and God's power. Does this still happen today? Can dreadful events drive people closer to God?

SANKOFA

In March 2019, a cruel storm (Cyclone Idai) wrecked the African nations of Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. Anyone familiar with those countries knows that they are countries which face many challenges. So, the destruction was horrifying. The storm took many lives and livelihoods. Indeed, many persons were not found. This cyclone left thousands of people homeless and in dire straits. It was

a human tragedy at its worst.

As is usual, the international community responded with various relief supplies. But the survivors needed more than physical supplies. They also craved hope to face their shattered lives and an uncertain future.

Luckily, groups like The International Bible Society (Biblica) saw this. They supplied survivors with Bibles, booklets, and other resources designed to cater to their emotional and spiritual needs. One booklet, entitled “When Your Whole World Changes,” helps survivors of disasters to find answers for many of the perplexing questions people struggle with after such tragedies.

According to reports from rescue workers and church leaders involved in the rescue effort, the Bible-based resources helped many persons to find emotional relief. The survivors expressed deep gratitude for the resources and the related emotional and spiritual nutrition which they received. Such resources are invaluable in helping survivors to build and/or maintain faith in God, in the aftermath of catastrophic wreckage.

There is a famous saying that Christians are like teabags: We never know how strong they are until they are in hot water. This is a fitting point to consider. What, if anything, could break our faith in God? Could a storm of the magnitude of Cyclone Idai do it?

CASE STUDY

At that beginning of this lesson I asserted that the disciples came out of the storm more informed and spiritually healthier. For our case

study we followed up on this thought. Can people really grow emotionally and spiritually after a terrible storm experience? In August 2015, Huffpost.com carried an article that looked at the mental health landscape in New Orleans ten years after Hurricane Katrina. The article by Carolyn Gregoire, "In Katrina's Aftermath, Psychologists Find Trauma as Well as Resilience," gave deep insights into the non-physical post-disaster battles storm survivors undergo. The article painted a complex picture of serious upheavals in mental health during the physical recovery in New Orleans. Yet, the researchers saw several bright spots in the darkness which followed Katrina's onslaught.

The study was part of the Resilience in Survivors of Katrina (RISK) Project. Among other findings, it showed that "many Katrina survivors experienced mental health issues related to the disaster. But researchers were surprised to observe that a number of survivors also showed remarkable resilience, and even growth, in the wake of trauma." Dr. Jean Rhodes, a psychologist at the University of Massachusetts in Boston, was one of the project's chief investigators. He noted that their data revealed that, "Natural disasters and other traumatic events could be engines of growth, resulting in a kind of spiritual awakening." Dr. Rhodes explained the paradox this way, "A high percentage of survivors struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health conditions before going on to experience what is known as post-traumatic

growth. Others experienced mental illness related to the disaster that ultimately did not lead to resilience or growth.”

This study, along with others that supported its findings, confirmed the disastrous impact the calamity had on people’s mental and social health. Yet, it was not all doom and gloom. A follow-up survey, which built on the RISK research, highlighted that among low-income, unmarried African American women who survived the storm, about half of the respondents “could be considered resilient, meaning they experienced an increase in psychological distress after the disaster, but returned to pre-disaster distress levels within three years.” The report went further and noted, “...roughly 30 percent of survivors experienced post-traumatic growth...this growth took the form of improved relationships, greater empathy and compassion, enhanced spirituality, an improved sense of personal strength, and the ability to envision new possibilities in life.”

Such reports including one from Joy Osofsky, a Louisiana State University psychologist, confirmed that several survivors of disasters grew significantly because of the storm experience. The Osofsky report observed that several survivors felt “they had also learned a lot and because of that experience would be better able to cope with other adversities in their lives.”

Of course, people do not invite or welcome storms or disasters of any kind. Nonetheless, we must keep before us the truth that tragedies can make us stronger and more mature. In the aftermath

of the disciples' Galilee storm experience, we find great personal lessons for our lives. As noted in Isaiah 61:3, we can find beauty in the ashes of disasters.

LIFE APPLICATION

In the storm situations we referred to in the two preceding sections, several Christians perished. Based on historical accounts, when disasters impact a country or community, Christians as a group get no special exemption tickets. People of faith have spiritual resources that equip them to weather disasters better. However, we must accept that at times in our lives we will have to face and deal with various storms. The hope and mindset we bring to these disasters will decide whether we sink or swim to better outcomes. It is therefore wise and advisable for us to check our emotional and spiritual disaster preparedness. Before a storm hits, we check on supplies of water, food, and other emergency supplies. Likewise, we should check our emotional and spiritual capacities prior to disasters. We must adopt the motto of the Boy Scouts and "Be Prepared" to face the storms of life. Unless we have a valid worldview of disasters, we can become despondent when they knock on our doors, believing that our God has forsaken us. In the Galilee storm experience, the disciples had Jesus physically in the boat with them. While they did not know what the Lord would do, they looked to him for survival. This set a wonderful example for us to follow. In our storms, whether physical or symbolic, we must call on God for help. We should never take upheavals in our lives as evidence that God

has abandoned us.

On the contrary, such turmoil can be blessed opportunities for us to prove our God's love for us. Storms force believers to answer the rhetorical question the Apostle Paul posed in Romans 8:35. If you are not certain you can say nothing can separate you from the love of Christ, make that issue a matter of intense prayer and meditation. As believers we cannot doubt in our mind that God cares for us. With the assurance David expresses in Psalm 23, we must know that even when we walk through the valleys of death, we can fear no evil. For if our hearts are in the right place, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Questions:

1. Place yourself in the boat, list and describe the fears that the disciples might have had when the storm overtook their boat.
2. What instances have you come through life's storms where your faith has been strengthened? Who accompanied you through your storm?
3. Some scientists argue that the storm frequency and intensity has continued to increase (for example, the hurricanes and tropical storms in the Atlantic) and that this is due to climate change. What are your thoughts about this? What can people of faith do to address these concerns?

CLOSING DEVOTION

Closing Song: "In Thy Cleft, O Rock of Ages (Hide Thou Me),"

AMEC Hymn # 371

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, I believe that in times of storms you are my hiding place. I know the storms of life can be scary and will test my faith in you. Dear Lord, in the testing times, help me keep my eyes on you and your love for me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

June 7-June 13

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

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

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

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

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

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

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