

DELIVERED FROM FEAR

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 107:23–32

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 8:23–27; Mark 4:35–41; Luke 8:22–25

MATTHEW 8:23–27

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!



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KEY VERSE

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.—

Matthew 8:26

CONFIDENT HOPE

Unit 1: Jesus Teaches About Faith LESSONS 1–5

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Recall key elements of Jesus' stilling of the storm.
2. Compare and contrast the text with the other "little faith" passages of [Matthew 6:30](#); [14:31](#); [16:8](#); and [Luke 12:28](#) in their contexts.
3. Repent of an instance of a lack of faith.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. What Are You Afraid Of?
- B. Lesson Context: Sea of Galilee
- C. Lesson Context: Miracles
- I. The Perilous Situation ([Matthew 8:23–24](#))
 - A. Following Jesus (v. 23)
 - B. In a Deadly Storm (v. 24)
What to Do While God "Sleeps"
- II. The Act of Deliverance ([Matthew 8:25–27](#))
 - A. Cry of the Helpless (v. 25)
 - B. An Authoritative Word (v. 26) *Praying from Fear to Faith*
 - C. A Response of Amazement (v. 27)

Conclusion

- A. Faith Silences Fear
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember **HOW TO SAY IT**
 - agoraphobia uh-gore-uh-foe-be-uh.
 - ailurophobia eye-lur-uh-foe-be-uh.
 - claustrophobia klaw-struh-foe-be-uh.
 - cynophobia sigh-nuh-foe-be-uh.
 - Gadarenes Gad-uh-reens.

Galilee	<i>Gal-uh-lee.</i>
Gennesaret	Geh- <i>ness</i> -uh-ret (G as in get).
Mediterranean	<i>Med-uh-tuh-ray-nee-un.</i>
Pax Romana (<i>Latin</i>)	<i>Pahks Ro-mah-nah.</i>

Introduction

A. What Are You Afraid Of?

Context can cause the question above to be answered in different ways. It all depends on when, where, why, how, and by whom it is asked.

As an honest inquiry into what causes fear, we know that people experience fears of various kinds. Some common fears are fears of open spaces (agoraphobia) and closed spaces (claustrophobia). Much rarer is a fear of dogs (cynophobia) and of cats (ailurophobia). Between these two is a list that is virtually endless. And fears are very individualized. Sometimes they seem to make little sense—such as fear of mice on the part of a strong, smart person. Fears may be connected with traumas that have left an indelible mark on a person.

There is another way we can use the title question: it can be meant rhetorically—as a statement rather than an inquiry. The sense is something like, “You know that you have no reason to be afraid.” We all wish that we could say this to ourselves and our fears would disappear. Unfortunately, fear tends to persist even when we try to reason ourselves out of it.

Fear, as a God-given self-defense mechanism, can trigger a reaction of *fight, flight, or freeze*. The problem is that the particular reaction that results may be irrationally inappropriate or even harmful in a given context. At lower levels, chronic fear can ruin appetite, raise blood pressure, and cause ulcers. Fear itself can kill.

Our text today is about a situation that provoked fear: the fear of death in a deadly situation. How Jesus spoke and acted in the face of that fear can teach us much about the Lord we serve.

B. Lesson Context: Sea of Galilee

Jesus’ ministry in Matthew’s Gospel takes place mostly in Galilee, the northern portion of ancient Israel. The region was named for the body of water at its center, known in the New Testament as the Sea of Galilee or the Sea of Tiberias ([John 6:1](#)). It is about 41,000 acres in size, about 12 miles north to south and 7.5 miles east to west. Its size makes it more of a “lake” than a “sea”; by contrast, Lake Erie is about 150 times as large as the Sea of Galilee. Indeed, the latter is referred to as “the lake of Gennesaret” in [Luke 5:1](#). Nestled between steep hills on the east and west, one could stand on the hills and see to the other side. The distance would require much effort to row from one side to the other.

The Sea of Galilee was a center of fishing during the time of Jesus. Some of His 12 disciples had been fishermen there ([Matthew 4:18–22](#)). These men had much experience with this lake and its dangers. In addition to fishing, the inhabitants of the area used the lake as a medium of transportation from one village to another. Rowing across the sea was faster than the alternative of walking around on shore. We can imagine that on a typical day the sea was dotted with small boats—some fishing, some carrying travelers. On most days, those boats carried their passengers safely.

C. Lesson Context: Miracles

Following the Sermon on the Mount in [Matthew 5–7](#) (see [Lesson Context](#) of lesson 1), which sets forth Jesus’ authority in teaching, chapters 8–9 focuses largely on Jesus’ miracles. These demonstrate His authority in actions as they consistently pointed to a power that could belong to God alone. With a word, Jesus was able to heal the sick ([Matthew 8:5–13](#)), cleanse leprosy ([Luke 17:12–19](#); see lesson 5), cast out evil spirits ([Mark 7:24–30](#)), and command the forces of nature ([Mark 11:12–14, 19–21](#)). His miracles established that Jesus was either the most wonderful prophet ever sent by God or that He was something more than a prophet.

Jesus did not use His divine power for His own benefit (compare [Matthew 4:1–11; 26:53](#)). His miracles were for the sake of others, especially those whose situation seemed hopeless. As such, the miracles were signs that God’s kingdom—His promised reign over all creation that restores His righteous purpose—was breaking into the world. God’s reign would vanquish the sin-threat and its consequences. God’s people would then live in His presence, safe and secure, for eternity.

Jesus’ miracles demonstrated that promised future. His enemies attributed His ability to satanic powers ([Matthew 12:24](#)) and mocked Him ([27:42](#)). Still, Jesus made salvation possible by giving of His life. His resulting resurrection was His greatest act of power. But as we begin today’s text, that is yet a year or so in the future. (The events of today’s text are also recorded in [Mark 4:35–41](#) and [Luke 8:22–25](#).)

I. The Perilous Situation **(MATTHEW 8:23–24) A. Following** **Jesus (v. 23)**

23a. And when he was entered into a ship.

This phrase invites the reader to connect this story to the ones just before it ([Matthew 8:18–22](#)). There, Jesus encountered two men as He was about to cross the lake in *a ship*. Both wanted to follow Jesus, so Jesus pointed out the cost of doing so. God’s kingdom brings His promised blessings to His people, but it costs those people everything they have ([Matthew 13:44–46](#)). It’s unclear from that text if either man ended up following Jesus (compare [Luke 9:57–62](#)).

23b. His disciples followed him.

Matthew does not specify Jesus’ intended destination at this point (contrast [Mark 4:35; Luke 8:22](#)). In this Gospel, we have to wait until [Matthew 8:28](#) to discover that He and *His disciples* were headed to “the country of the Gergesenes,” on the other side of the lake.

We should note that any follower of Jesus may be referred to in the Gospels as a disciple (example: [Matthew 27:57](#)). The term refers to a learner who accepts and assists in spreading the teaching of another. But since the ship obviously had some size limitations, the disciples mentioned were most likely only the 12 original ones (see [Matthew 10:1–4](#)). As they boarded the ship, they did so in obedience, following their teacher. In Matthew’s Gospel, this band of disciples is just beginning to emerge as an identifiable unit.

Jesus did not choose these 12 because they were exemplary in every way, however. All four Gospels portray them largely as failing to understand Jesus’ mission (examples: [Matthew 16:13–27; Mark 10:35–45; Luke 18:15–17; John 4:25–38](#)). They were often fearful and spiritually deaf (examples: [Matthew 14:27; Mark 4:40; Luke 9:45](#)). As he went to His death, He predicted that they would all fall away, even as He looked forward to welcoming them back after His resurrection ([Matthew 26:31–32](#); see [28:16–20](#)). They continued to misunderstand His mission at least up until the time of His ascension ([Acts 1:6](#)).

B. In a Deadly Storm (v. 24)

24a. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves.

As sometimes happened on this lake, a storm *arose* that took the experienced boatmen by surprise. Storms in Galilee travel west to east from the Mediterranean Sea. The area to the immediate west of the lake consists of steep, high hills separated by narrow valleys. That means that storms can appear from the west with little warning for those on the lake since their view of approaching weather is blocked by the hills.

The remains of a first-century fishing boat was discovered along the shore in 1986. Its size (about 27 feet in length and 8 feet in width) indicates that *waves* of just a couple of feet could overwhelm such a vessel, especially when accompanied by rain. In deep water far from shore, these men faced death if their ship did not stay afloat.

24b. But he was asleep.

Mark's account specifies that Jesus was "in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow" ([Mark 4:38](#)). This refers to the stern of the vessel.

Somehow Jesus was sleeping through the rain, wind, waves, and noise. Was He so exhausted He could sleep through anything? Was His stamina so drained that He could not respond? The text does not say. Some students take the position that answering yes to either question would contradict what we and the disciples later learn about Jesus in [Matthew 26:36–45](#) and [John 13:3](#). Others think that a yes answer is possible based on [Matthew 4:2; 27:32](#); and [John 4:6](#).

Either way, the fact of Jesus' sleeping during a storm should not be bypassed too quickly. The psalmist presents sleep as the answer of a confident believer to the dangers of this world (see [Psalms 3:5; 4:8](#)). Jesus shows no fear because He truly has no reason to fear. We can safely assume that a deadly storm would awaken most, if not all, of us. But Jesus experienced a freedom from fear that is unlike any in our ordinary experience. This surely points to Jesus' confidence in His identity. He knew His mission was leading Him to the cross ([John 12:23–36; 19:30](#)); He would not die on the sea.

What Do You Think?

Under what circumstances should you not allow another person's fear to become your own?
Why?

Digging Deeper

What Scripture passages back up your position in this regard?

WHAT TO DO WHILE GOD 'SLEEPS'

I woke to the sound of gunfire. Another conflict had erupted between refugees and the host community. Tens of thousands of refugees had fled their homeland, where planes were bombing their villages. Now they faced daily uncertainty: lack of food, lack of water. And whenever someone stole a goat or got into a fight, violence and retaliation quickly followed. Was God sleeping?

Some refugees and those of the host community had resorted to violence and vengeance in the midst of God's apparent inaction. But others had developed a deep and transformative faith. Hassan (name changed) had chosen faith. Whenever his neighbors ran to get their rifles, Hassan would stop them and ask them to pray instead. Despite the danger, despite God's seeming slumber, Hassan chose to trust God.

When God “sleeps” through your desperate need, will you respond with bitter violence, or will you step out in faith and encourage others to do the same? Remember: “he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Psalm 121:4).

—D. G.

II. The Act of Deliverance

(MATTHEW 8:25–27)

A. Cry of the Helpless (v. 25)

25a. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord.

Unlike Jesus, *the disciples* registered their peril. Their skills on the sea were not enough to protect them from this grave danger. They were all going to die! For Jesus to be sleeping through the storm was incomprehensible to them. They did not yet understand Jesus’ identity.

The disciples needed someone more powerful than themselves. And to their credit, they at least knew who that someone was. Other boats were also out on the water (Mark 4:36), but the disciples were focused on their own peril as they addressed Jesus as *Lord*. This term ascribed authority to Him, but exactly what kind of authority they meant isn’t entirely clear.

While obviously God is often called Lord, the Greek word translated in this way can just mean master or sir (examples: Matthew 6:24; 27:63). It is possible that the disciples acknowledged Jesus as their teacher, but not as equal to God at this time. Perhaps that idea is like a seed in their minds, about to germinate.

Certainly the disciples had much still to learn about who Jesus is. Even when Peter later declared Jesus to be “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16), the disciple immediately showed that what he had just confessed he did not yet understand (see 16:21–27). A clearer understanding of what it meant for Jesus to be the Christ would not come to the disciples until after He rose to life from the grave (example: Luke 24:26–34). Still, the disciples already knew enough to call Him Lord—one superior to them in authority in some way.

25b. Save us: we perish.



Visual for Lessons 2 & 4. While considering verse 26a, have learners pray silently for one minute, asking for growing faith in a specific situation.

For many believers, the concept of being saved refers primarily (if not exclusively) to God’s gift of salvation from sin and death (example: [Ephesians 2:4–8](#)). In Jesus’ day, however, the Greek word translated *save* and its variants were used for all kinds of rescuing. It was often used by political and military leaders who took credit for benefits they brought to the people they led. This was especially true of the emperors, who “saved” the people in their empire through the Pax Romana (the “Roman Peace”).

The Greek word behind the translation could also be used of any act that brought benefit to those in need or protection for those in danger (example: [Luke 23:39](#)). Clearly the disciples were asking Jesus to save them from drowning in the stormy sea, not requesting eternal salvation.

We too cry out to Jesus in this way at times. We also fear perishing physically because of events — some of our own making — in this sin-sick world. When we look at the disciples in this account, in many ways we are looking in a mirror.

B. An Authoritative Word (v. 26)

26a. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?

The disciples had enough reason to trust Jesus in this terrible storm. The mighty power He had already demonstrated was more than adequate evidence (examples: [Matthew 4:23–25](#); [8:1–13](#)).

Their fear stemmed from their *little faith*. The word being translated occurs five times in the Gospels (here and [Matthew 6:30](#) [see lesson 1]; [14:31](#); [16:8](#); and [Luke 12:28](#)). Its use indicates a mild rebuke. If they

had much faith, they could trust that Jesus would act for them, even if He did not act immediately. By this point in their experience with Jesus, the disciples should have been able to recognize that such dangers pose no real threat, given the evidence of miracles. This fact should have resulted in showing more courage when facing situations that normally result in fear and anxiety. The five uses of “little faith” reveal sadly that this would not be the last time Jesus would chastise them in this regard.

Jesus’ words challenged the disciples to let their faith grow to fit the magnitude of their Lord’s power and His gracious goodwill to use it on their behalf. Elsewhere, Jesus taught that “faith as a grain of mustard seed” could move a mountain ([Matthew 17:20](#)). Little faith has potential, but in this case fear weakened it.

What Do You Think?

Realizing that fear is a God-given emotion, how will you know when a reaction of fear is natural and when it indicates lack of faith?

Digging Deeper

How do [John 7:13](#); [9:22](#); [12:42](#); [1 Peter 3:6, 14](#); [1 John 4:18](#); and [Revelation 2:10](#) help frame your answer?

26b. Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

Jesus’ rebuke of *the winds and the sea* is something of a counterpart to His rebuke of the disciples’ little faith. Some believe that the Lord will meet their needs only if they have enough faith to satisfy Him. But Jesus saves the small of faith even as He urges them on to greater faith. We should realize, however, that having little faith is perilously close to having no faith (compare [Matthew 17:14–20](#)). And, paradoxically, belief and unbelief can exist side by side ([Mark 9:24](#)).

For a moment, the act of saving in the lesson text foreshadows saving for eternity. The angel announced to Joseph before Jesus’ birth, “He shall save his people from their sins” ([Matthew 1:21](#)).

Jesus’ mighty deeds were visible signs of the greater work He would do to cleanse the guilty and restore them as God’s eternal people ([Titus 2:11–14](#)).

Jesus’ followers went on to face many perilous situations that could easily—and often did—take their lives. They ultimately learned to rely on Jesus to protect them, even to restore life by resurrection ([2 Corinthians 4:17](#)). He will always use His almighty, divine power for the long-term benefit of those who love Him. That is true even when (or especially when) the situation seems hopeless and He seems unresponsive to our need (compare [Job 30:20](#); [Psalm 22:2](#); [Revelation 6:10](#)).

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to someone who takes today's text to mean we shouldn't bother to wear life jackets when out boating because Jesus is always with us?

Digging Deeper

Going the other way, at what point does a concern for "safety first" become an idol?

PRAYING FROM FEAR TO FAITH

At 2:00 a.m. I was still on my knees crying out desperately to the Lord. Foremost on my mind was a stormy conflict that had been brewing between two Christian groups. One group was bent on a course of action that I thought would be disastrous. I begged God to intervene.

As I pleaded with God to prevent this other group's plans, it felt like God spoke silently in a bemused tone, "Would it really be so bad?" The simple rebuke completely changed my outlook. I calmed down, thinking, *Where is my faith? Can't God work through this other group too?*

At that point my prayer shifted from one of desperate pleading to one of trusting that God would accomplish what He desired through whichever group He chose to work through. That would happen even if I didn't understand.

Are your prayers filled with anxious worry or with joyful trust? Can you faithfully follow the one who commands sky and sea—the one who loves us more than we can imagine—regardless of the storm around you? If not, why not?

—D. G.

C. A Response of Amazement (v. 27) **27a. But the men marvelled.**

As God's words put the waters of the seas in their place ([Genesis 1:9–10](#)), so Jesus' words did with the storm. The New Testament makes clear that Jesus is the Creator. That the Creator is able to command His own creation in a miraculous way should not surprise us (see [John 11:1–4](#); [Colossians 1:16](#)). But witnessing Jesus' power at work makes the disciples awestruck. This is the frequent reaction when people see Jesus' mighty power at work in the form of miracles and in word (examples: [Matthew 9:33](#); [15:31](#); [21:20](#); [22:22](#); [27:14](#)). Mark emphasizes only the great fear of the disciples ([Mark 4:41](#)).

What Do You Think?

Under what circumstances, if any, is it appropriate to cause fear in another person?

Digging Deeper

What Scripture passages back you up on

27b. Saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!

The disciples recognized that what Jesus did was not the work of an ordinary *man*. The disciples were experiencing what some call “cognitive dissonance” today. What they saw—Jesus commanding *the winds and the sea* and both obeying Him—did not match their normal, day to day experience that storms do not obey human commands.

[Psalm 107:23–32](#) describes a scene very much like the one the disciples had just experienced. Men went out to sea, witnessing the wonders of the waters God created. A storm arose, lifting huge waves, provoking terror in the sailors. They cried out to the Lord, the God of Israel, for protection. God stilled the storm, eliciting joy and thanksgiving from those whose lives had been spared. There was no doubt who had saved them (compare [Jonah 2:1–9](#)).

Jesus had just done what the psalmist described God as doing. Only the one who created the wind and the waves in the first place can command them. In Jesus, God had become a man. Because of His mighty power that He graciously exercised on humanity’s behalf, they had nothing to fear.

Conclusion

A. Faith Silences Fear

What do you fear? Typically, the things that make us most afraid are those that threaten us in some way because we can’t control them. Instead of praying first, we first try our best to gain control. But in the end we recognize that our control is very limited. Disease stalks even those who eat right and exercise. Financial crises strike even the prudent. Accidents happen to the careful. Our protective reach cannot constantly extend as far as those we love.

There is a far superior alternative to trying to maintain control over our circumstances first and, when that fails, turning to the Lord. The alternative is to reverse those priorities. Because Jesus gave His life for us, we can surely trust Him to do for us what He did for 12 men of little faith in a small ship—and more.

The created world is filled with mortal dangers. Our reaction should be that of the psalmist:

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. ([Psalm 91:1–3](#)).

What Do You Think?

What action will you take to overcome your most troubling fear? *Digging Deeper*
Who can you confide in to help you through this struggle?

B. Prayer

Lord God, we confess that we are a fearful people. Our faith is small. Help us grow in faith as we freely confess our mixture of belief and unbelief as did the man in [Mark 9:24](#) as we entrust ourselves to You. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Allow the Lord to grow your faith and silence your fears.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Draw a large circle on the board. In the center, write the word *STORM*. Ask class members to mention a time when they experienced a major storm of life; encourage expressions of feelings they had during the storm. Expect responses such as fear, anxiety, worry, pain, uncertainty, loss, calm, and fatalism. Affirm all responses by jotting them inside the circle as they are voiced. (Concentrate on the feelings without pressing for details of the problems.) As this is happening, have a volunteer copy responses onto separate pieces of paper suitable to use flashcards (to be used below).

Make a transition by saying, “Let’s see what we can learn by comparing and contrasting these feelings with those of people who were in the very presence of Jesus himself during a storm in the first century AD.”

Into the Word

Before having today’s text read aloud, distribute the flashcards created above to members of the class as evenly as possible. (*Option.* Depending on how many words you’ve written and the size of your class, you may find it desirable to ask those holding flashcards to come to the front of the room.)

As the text is read aloud, ask class members to show cards they’re holding that reflect what they think the disciples were feeling as each verse is read. Do this slowly, or perhaps do it twice. Then, for every card that was raised, underline the corresponding word inside the circle you created on the board earlier.

Distribute handouts (you prepare) of the following questions to small groups of three or four:

- 1—What makes us think the disciples felt each of these emotions?
- 2—Would we add some words to what we’ve already written to describe what the disciples felt?
- 3—Was it wrong or sinful for them to be afraid?
- 4—What did they do that was right?
- 5—What does their reaction teach us about how to handle our own fears?
- 6—What differences and similarities do you see in other passages where Jesus voiced concern about “little faith”? (See [Matthew 6:30](#) [last week’s lesson]; [14:31](#); and [16:8](#).)

Include on the handout the following four column headers for use in discussing question 6. Leave plenty of room for writing underneath:

was it was	Where Who How What	involved did it turn	out can we learn
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As groups work through the questions, write the same four column headers on the board. After groups finish working, consolidate groups’ input under these headers to compare and contrast discoveries.

Option. For broader comparison with other texts, distribute copies of the “Sailors Afraid” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners to complete it in groups. Discuss as time allows.

Into Life

Give each learner a slip of paper on which is printed the following:

A time when I gave in to faithless fear was ...

Ask learners to complete the sentence as you hasten to add that you will not collect them. Allow a time for volunteers to read their completions. (If the nature and mood of the class permits it, you can ask jokingly, “What are the rest of you afraid of?”)

Option. Distribute copies of the “Fear Busters” exercise on the activity page. Allow time for learners to work in groups for the Scripture search portion of the activity and then complete the second half of it individually.

Encourage placement where learners will see theirs daily, as indicated.

ACTIVITY PAGE

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