

Jesus' Rebuke of Wind and Sea (Mat. 8. 23-27)

WestminsterReformedChurch.org

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6-26-2005

Introduction

We come today to discuss the marvelous account in Matthew 8.23-27 where we have record of the rebuke of wind and sea by the Lord Jesus Christ.

**And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. <sup>24</sup> And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. <sup>25</sup> And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." <sup>26</sup> And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. <sup>27</sup> And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"**

We can cover this text by considering three things: the person of Christ, the schooling in faith, and the parable of restoration.

1A. First, consider the person of Christ

What is going on in this narrative? There is a "great storm" that threatens both boat and passengers, but Jesus sleeps. In contrast to the unrest of the disciples and in contrast to the restless waves, Jesus is calm, so calm that the disciples must make special efforts to wake Him up. When He woke up He spoke to the disciples and to the winds and sea, and both responded to Him. The great storm became a great calm and great fear became great awe. Thus, they marveled and said, "What sort of man is this?" This question directs our focus to the person of Christ. We can meditate on some things about this man that will make us marvel like these men marveled (He was asleep, unafraid, full of faith, and in control).

1B. Jesus was asleep

Although He did not purposely draw attention to Himself, His proclamation of the kingdom in both word and deed, by teaching and miracle working, caused many to seek Him for instruction and healing; crowds gathered and challenges increased. One way to manage the crowds was to get on a boat and sail to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (cf. 8.18; this paragraph continues the narrative that began before the interaction with a scribe and another disciple). There He could find some much needed rest for He truly became weary in His labors.

Some reflection on His need of rest helps us see that He was a man among men, but there is something much more profound for us to ponder here. The one who sleeps is the son of Mary *who existed before the world was created*. Although He was God, in the beginning with God, and one with God, He became flesh and dwelt among us. He truly assumed human nature in His coming. He assumed a true and full human nature.

Perhaps, this has become an all too familiar fact about the Lord Jesus for who has to tell us that Christmas refers to the birth of Christ? Who has to inform us that His body was pinned to a Roman cross? However, this is a profound and significant fact. The eternal Word became flesh as Immanuel, God with us. He has a true human nature. He was not a super-man. He grew in understanding. He marveled at the created order and at the unfolding of the purposes of God (Mat 8.10). He was subject to emotional stress, to weeping, and to anger. He was subject to the effects of a hard day's work that makes you weary and that instills a desire to find a quiet place to rest your weary bones. Although Jesus had no place to lay His head, although this world was not His home, He lived here, rested here, found a place to lay His head here, and He slept here. Look at Him asleep on the boat in the storm. Gloriously, marvelously, and wonderfully, we can say these words that seem inappropriate, "The Lord of heaven and earth is fast asleep." They

seem inappropriate because we are saying that God sleeps, even though the Lord of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps, and Jesus is the Lord of Israel.

### 2B. He was unafraid and full of faith

We hear His courage and His faith in the question He asks of the disciples. “Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?” What He sees in the storm does not cause Him to fear.

The waves swamp the boat, but Jesus sleeps at rest in the Father’s hands. He is at peace in the storm under the care of the Father whose will He came to fulfill. He is not afraid as indicated by the fact that *while* the winds raged and the waves overwhelmed the ship, He questions the disciples regarding their fear and unbelief. We can almost hear Him saying to us, “What is your problem? Why are you fearful?” His courage and faith stand in contrast to the fear and unbelief of the disciples. Doing the will of God is the key to courage and faith come what may!

### 3B. He was in control

The Lord Jesus was in control in more ways than one. He was in control of His emotions because He could rest in the storm (the agitation surrounding Him, threatening Him, did not make Him agitated). He was in control when His words to the disciples echoed through the towering waves and raging winds. However, I am sure that you, along with me, marvel most at the control He exercised over the raging winds and the troubled sea. This control is so incredible that it is hard to talk about it. Words fail us; we need a thousand tongues to sing about the ruler of all nature and to speak in a way that begins to do justice to His matchless glory.

We are told that He rebuked the winds and waves. Of course, a rebuke is something that applies to persons not things. The created order is personified in an unusual use of personification. It is unusual because this is not simply a literary device to produce some powerful impression on a reader. What then is it? How can we characterize it? I am not exactly sure how to characterize it, but we can make a stab at it. Jesus places the winds and sea into the figurative category of persons; they are likened to a group of restless people that are troubled and causing trouble for everyone around them. Furthermore, the Lord’s rebuke by personification produces an event. The winds and the sea actually hear what He has to say and they respond accordingly. How then can we characterize the personification here? It is historical fact, created order, and event producing personification!

It is as if Jesus said something like this, “O creation, you are groaning in travail since the fall, to be sure, but you are too impatient. You ought to be ashamed for this outburst of conflict, discontentment, and strife. You are out of control, out of bounds, and disorderly in your conduct. Enough is enough, get your act together and get it together now.” Marvelously and gloriously, these two persons of the highest creational rank, the powerful wind and the mighty wave, dropped immediately, suddenly, apologetically, and worshipfully to their knees in utter silence with obvious shame before this wind blown, wet faced, and sleepy eyed man, the Lord Jesus. To speak of Him as a sleepy eyed man is gospel good news!

This account, this event, and the very words by which the event was produced give us a soul absorbing look at Jesus, the redeemer of God’s elect. Thus, it is not the case that the human Jesus slept in the boat and the divine Christ arose to rebuke the restless creation. No, it is the same person who slept in the boat that stilled the storm. As the catechism puts it, “The redeemer of God’s elect is Jesus Christ, who being the eternal Son of God, became man and so was and continues to be, God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever” (QA 21).

We marvel and we rejoice as we meditate on the true humanity of Christ because by assuming flesh and blood, He could cross the boundary between the living and the dead, assume death in our place, and become our Savior, Lord, Master, and Teacher.

## 2A. The schooling in faith

In marked contrast to the calmness displayed by Christ, the disciples are gripped by fear: “we are going under, the ship is going down, we are doomed, so Lord deliver us!”

In light of their anxiety (extreme anxiety and well-founded to be sure), the question of Jesus seems callous, even ridiculous, at first glance. A disciple might reply, “You ask, ‘why am I afraid,’ but what kind of question is this; it is undeniably obvious, Lord, we are perishing. No need to ask, just look around.”

Let us piece together some steps in answering this question (or ways of answering it) that help us understand the schooling in faith that Jesus is carrying out (for them and us).

### 1) Actually, the question does need to be asked

As is the case in situations where deep emotions are stirred up and driving us, this is an example situation in which it is necessary to probe through the fog (the emotional fog) and pin down the root cause of the fear. We need to do so right in the thick of things. This means that Jesus is directing the disciples to something other than the storm; the storm, winds, waves, and raging sea are not the actual cause of their fear. The root cause is the littleness of their faith. Jesus associates their fear with the fact that they are weak in faith when He says, “Why do you fear, O you of little faith?”

2) The question makes them, and all disciples, remember what they have seen before getting on this boat. They are disciples who are following Jesus under His command. They witnessed His glory with their own eyes in the cleansing of the leper, the healing of the centurion’s servant, the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law, and the countless other miracles that Jesus performed as He went about preaching, teaching, and healing (Mat 4.23-25).

What then is Jesus saying by this question? He is saying that they have no good reason to fear. Their natural fears (understandable without question) should be neutralized and countered by the due recognition of who Jesus is as the redeemer of Israel who has come to bring healing from all of our diseases. If Jesus can do all of the things that He did regarding the restoration of health to afflictions of the body (leprosy, fever, etc), and you can trust Him with your physical life, then you can trust Him in circumstances of your physical environment that threaten your life.

### 3) Therefore, we have schooling in faith

They do have faith. They go to Him for salvation, but their faith is weak and in need of development. That development comes by new circumstances and challenges in divine schooling in faith. Here in the storm, the key is to keep their eyes fixed on the Lord. They look to Him in faith but it is a weak faith because they are overwhelmed with fear of perishing (look through the object of fear to Christ).

Faith is trust in the person of Christ with recognition of His power to save us through thick and thin in the face of dying and death. Faith means clinging to Him through the storms of life acknowledging that He is universal Lord of all. Faith acknowledges that He is Sabbath king, that He rules all that He created and made.

## 3A. The parable of restoration

I refer to this as a parable not because it uses personification and not to suggest that anything less than a miraculous event took place by the word of the Lord Jesus.

My point comes out if we set a stage by these questions. Why did Jesus perform this miracle? Why was this miracle recorded?

The answer is that we have instruction in the power of Christ to encourage our faith, ground our hope, and increase our understanding. It does all of these things in a “faith-school” because the miracle is an enacted parable of restoration that reveals the gospel-good-news of the coming

of the kingdom. Here is good news: wind, wave, and sea, and creation itself, do not operate autonomously, but in subjection to bondage because of sin and in hope because of the righteousness of Christ. Thus, as disciples we learn that Jesus came to secure restoration from all the effects of the fall in a universal and cosmic way. The creation itself groans in travail waiting for its deliverance into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Paul unpacks in Romans 8 what Jesus anticipates in the rebuke of winds and sea).

The day is coming when the restless creation will bow before the Lord Jesus in humble obedience and compliance. That day is the day of our redemption and adoption as sons in resurrection glory.

Now wind and sea groan impatiently and in shame, they worship Christ quietly on the Sea of Galilee. By this monumental event in history, Jesus shows us before the time what is in store for our world and us because Jesus came to save sinners and deliver the very creation from all the effects of man's fall into sin. His Lordship is universal. The earth is His and all the fullness thereof.

There are three pointed things to say in conclusion

1) Trust the Lord Jesus in the storms of wind and wave

We might call this the analogy of faith. Take on new experiences and new thresholds by analogy with the old. Entrust yourself to this man, Jesus, clinging to Him as sovereign Lord of creation from beginning to end and top to bottom. *We can best endure the storms when we fix our hearts on the fact that Jesus sleeps through them (that as God with us, He is unafraid, full of faith and in control)*. We may think at times that He is asleep and out of touch with our lives, but His sleeping means that He is in control. He is God over all and blessed forever (Rom 9.5). The real problem in our fears is not the usual object (cause, focus) of our fear; the real problem is our lack of faith and lack of focus on the Lord Jesus.

Therefore, He has you and me in a school of faith. Remember that your commitment to follow Him wherever His goes is a commitment to learn how to trust Him more and more through thick and thin. Remember that the trial of faith in His school develops faith in a way that is more precious than silver or gold.

2) Fix your hope on Him in the storms of wind and wave

It is breathtaking to think of what He did on the sea, of how He calmed the restless creation. It is even more breathtaking to think that what He did was just the first fruits of the coming harvest. He did this miracle on the sea and He had Matthew record it in order to fix our hope on Him in the storms of wind and wave that cover the earth in its present time of travail. So think about the incredible act He did back on the sea as a window to the future that shows us in part what is yet to come in fullness. The Lord of the Sabbath is going to give you and me a new heavens and a new earth! What we have now as our inheritance is a travailing earth occupied by rebellious sinners (cf. land locked shore lines like Lake Huron north of Port Huron); it is ours but our full possession awaits *the word of Christ*; when He speaks the word it will be done and a glorious calm will cover the earth.

3) Bow to Him in worship in the storms of wind and wave

Ponder who He is and meditate on His person and work. Stand in awe at the majesty of the man, Christ Jesus. What kind of man is this that even the winds and the waves obey Him? He is Son of man and Son of God. He is the Lord from heaven, the Lord of glory. Therefore, worship is the all-embracing aspect of discipleship as we make our journey through the storms of life.

To Him be the honor, glory, and praise both now and forevermore, Amen.

