

Matthew 8:18-27

Introduction

- A. I don't think we can be reminded too often that Matthew is not *only* a historian telling us *what* happened, he is an apostle and a teacher telling us the true *meaning* of what happened.
1. Matthew has an inspired *agenda* as he reports to us what he has seen and heard.
 2. And so his *ultimate* purpose in writing (borrowing the words of Paul) is that we might "be filled with the knowledge of [God's] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:9-10).
- B. After the first few chapters of introducing us to Jesus as the Messiah and the one who brings the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament, Matthew gave us a summary statement about Jesus' ministry in Galilee.
1. "And he went throughout all Galilee, *teaching* in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and *healing* every disease and every affliction among the people."
 2. Word and deed! Teaching and healing!
 3. We saw how we can never fully understand the meaning of Jesus' *deeds* and miracles of healing apart from His *words* and the *message* of the kingdom (the rule of God in the Messiah).
 4. And we can't ultimately understand His *message* apart from His *deeds*.
- C. In Jesus, word and deed truly go together. They cannot be separated.
1. So Matthew goes on in chapters 5-7 to give us a summary of Jesus' words (his kingdom *message*) in the Sermon on the Mount.
 2. And then in chapters 8-9, Matthew turns from Jesus' words to give us a collection of Jesus' *deeds*.
 3. In this collection, there are nine miracle stories divided into three sets of three with two teaching interludes.
 4. So even here, Matthew carefully combines Jesus' *deeds* with Jesus' *words*.
- D. Last week we looked at the first of the teaching interludes.
- E. And now today we come to the only "nature miracle" of all the miracles that Matthew includes in this collection (contra healing miracles).
1. This immediately catches our interest.
 2. *Why* the nature miracle? And why place it here (contra Mark and Luke)?
- F. We saw last week that Matthew has *inserted into* this story of the calming of the storm, the story of the scribe and the disciple.
1. He starts to tell the story of the calming of the storm, then stops to tell the story of the scribe and the disciple, and then picks up where he left off with the story of the calming of the storm.

2. This is our first clue that Matthew wants us to understand the calming of the storm **in light of** what we learned last week (from the story of the scribe and the disciple.)

G. Last week we saw that the scribe *offered* to follow Jesus and was rebuffed.

1. In light of the culture of the day, we can assume that the scribe thought he was doing Jesus a favor.
2. He was offering to sign up with Jesus *just because* he wanted to, but he was not responding to a sovereign *command* from Jesus.
3. The (casual) disciple, on the other hand, never offered to follow Jesus anywhere, but it was nevertheless *this* man that Jesus graciously *commanded* to follow Him.
4. And when this disciple asked about taking care of his father, Jesus only repeated the *command*: “Follow me” and then he commissioned him to proclaim everywhere the gospel of the kingdom.

H. But does the command of Jesus supersede even the fifth commandment (“honor your father and your mother”)?

1. Does Jesus really have the right to say that only spiritually dead sons will let traditional responsibilities involved in honoring their father stand in the way of submitting to His command?
2. Does Jesus really have the right to say that only spiritually dead fathers will use the fifth commandment to keep a son from submitting to His command?
3. In short, who is this man who **commands** such absolute allegiance and who will not even **accept** anything less?
4. It is this question that Matthew means to answer in the story of the calming of the storm.

Verse 18 – Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave [commandment] to go over to the other side.

- A. Our story actually begins in verse 18 when Jesus “gave the *command* to go over to the other side” (Greek).
- B. Mark and Luke tell us that Jesus simply said: “*Let us* go across to the other side”.
- C. But Matthew wants to emphasize the lordship of Jesus and His authority to *command* discipleship and so he shows us the Master giving orders to the disciples.
- D. He gave the command to go over to the other side.

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

- A. If we skip ahead to verse 23 where the story resumes, Matthew tells us that “when he got into the boat, his disciples *followed* him.”
 1. Luke simply says: “So they set out.”
 2. And Mark says that “[the disciples] took [Jesus] with them in the boat”.
 3. There is no contradiction here, but to say that “the disciples *took Jesus with them* in the boat” is certainly very different from saying that the “disciples *followed [Jesus into the boat]*”!

- B. Do you see what Matthew is doing?
1. Matthew has the disciples *following* Jesus in verse 23 because “following” is the appropriate response to the word of *command* in verse 18.
 2. And, of course, Matthew has just illustrated this point in the story that he inserted about the scribe who offered to follow Jesus and the disciple who was *commanded to follow* Jesus.
 3. We see once again that Matthew has purposefully **woven** these two stories together not only by *inserting* one into the other but also by choosing *language* in the one story that will match the theme and language of the other.
 4. Once again, we need to see that for Matthew, the story of Jesus’ calming of the storm is meant to answer the question: Who is this man who *commands* a disciple to *follow* Him and who will not accept anything less than absolute and uncompromising obedience?
 5. **Who is this man** whose word of command seems to supersede even the fifth commandment?

Verse 24 – And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep.

- A. “Behold” is always meant to draw special attention to what is about to happen.
1. In this story, it adds vividness.
 2. Matthew means for us to *experience* this storm as though we were in the boat ourselves.
- B. This was a “great” storm, Matthew says. Or as some translations say, it was a “fierce” and “furious” storm.
1. The Sea of Galilee is about thirteen miles long and about seven miles wide, and it lies about 700 feet below sea level in a basin that is surrounded by mountains.
 2. So it was not uncommon (and *still* isn’t uncommon) for moisture to move in off the Mediterranean, condense along the high mountain ranges (as high as 9000 feet), and then suddenly and without warning swoop down on the Sea of Galilee with a terrible vengeance.
 3. Luke says that a windstorm “came down” on the lake.
 4. When Matthew says that this was a “great” storm (literally “megas seismos” or “great earthquake”), he invites us to imagine the worst.
 5. Indeed, the boat was being swamped by the waves.
 6. They were in imminent danger of being drowned and swallowed up by the Sea.
- C. Now in the Old Testament, there is a whole theology of the Sea or of the “deep”.
- D. Among the nations that surrounded Israel, the sea was often pictured as something chaotic, and destructive, and uncontrollable.
1. And so the sea was personified as a great **monster or dragon**.
 2. We see this, for example, when Isaiah borrows from this imagery to describe the enemies of God.

3. Isaiah 27:1 – In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing *serpent*, Leviathan the twisting *serpent*, and he will slay the *dragon* that is in the sea.
 4. In the creation account, we see this picture of chaos when “the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2).
- E. And yet in creation, it was God who **ruled** over the deep and brought **order** out of the chaos.
1. It was God who *created* the seas (Gen. 1:9-10).
 2. And we read in Genesis 1:20-21,
 3. Genesis 1:20-21 – God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures...” So *God created the great sea monsters* (Heb.) and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm.
 4. Psalm 104:24-26 – O LORD... the earth is full of your creatures. Here is the sea, great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great. There go the ships, *and Leviathan, which you formed to play in it.*
 5. When God destroyed the world of Noah’s day, you could say that He let loose His dragon.
 6. Genesis 7:11 – On that day all the fountains of the great **deep** burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened.
 7. Yahweh *created* the sea; He *created* Leviathan (the “dragon” of the sea), and so therefore, He **alone** has power over the otherwise chaotic and uncontrollable and destructive forces of the sea.
 8. Isaiah 51:15 (cf. Jer. 31:35) – I am the LORD your God, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar— the LORD of hosts is his name.
- F. So now let’s step back into the boat with the disciples.
1. Are you a little more terrified than you were before? You should be!
 2. It would seem that God has let **loose** His dragon. He has stirred up the sea so that its waves are roaring – ready to devour the helpless disciples in their little boat.
- G. “But [Jesus] was asleep.”
1. Was He oblivious to the dragon?
 2. How could Jesus sleep when Leviathan had been let loose?
 3. Could He really be *that* tired?

Verse 25 – And they went and woke him, saying, “Save us, Lord; we are perishing.”

- A. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all have the disciples saying something slightly different.
1. So which one is right?
 2. Well, they’re *all* right!
 3. I can imagine one disciple crying out: “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” (Mark), while another cries out: “Master, Master, we are perishing!” (Luke), while yet another cries out in desperation: “Save us, Lord; we are perishing” (Matthew).

- B. These are seasoned fishermen who make their living on the Sea of Galilee!
1. They're not overreacting!
 2. And yet here are the professional seamen crying out to the Carpenter.
 3. Do you remember how Mark said that the disciples "took Jesus with them in the boat"?
 4. Well now we begin to see the appropriateness of Matthew's saying that "when Jesus got into the boat, his disciples followed him".
 5. The fishermen find themselves crying out to Jesus even in their **own** boat and on their "**own**" lake.
 6. It was Jesus, after all, who first commanded them to go over to the other side.
- C. I'm not sure what the disciples actually expected from Jesus; this Jesus who was apparently so tired that He had to be wakened from **sleep** in the middle of a storm.
1. They *knew* that the monster of the sea could be controlled and tamed only by its **Creator**, by Yahweh Himself.
 2. And yet partly out of terror and desperation, and partly because of a very tiny seed of faith that had been growing in their hearts, they cried out to *Jesus* hoping that somehow, in some way, He might be able to bring them aid.

Verse 26a – And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?"

- A. Here's what one commentator says (with a slight addition of my own): "Very recently these men had been selected to be Christ's disciples, with a view to apostleship and all this implied. Would the One who had chosen them [and commanded them to cross the sea] allow them now to perish in the angry deep?" (Hendriksen)
- B. When we think about things this way, we realize that there is really no good reason to be afraid.
- C. But then we think about Leviathan and the devouring waves and we wonder if Jesus will just tell us not to be afraid, or if He will actually find some way to save us.

Verse 26b – Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.

- A. Jesus rebuked **Leviathan** and tamed the **dragon** with a word.
1. This storm didn't just blow over. It was supernaturally *interrupted*.
 2. And so the "great ("mega") storm" gave way to what Matthew calls a "**great** ("mega") calm".
 3. Suddenly, just like that, not only did the wind stop, but the waves were immediately stilled.
- B. And so we are reminded of three passages in the Psalms:
1. **Psalm 89:8-9** – O YAHWEH God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O YAHWEH, with your faithfulness all around you? You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.
 2. **Psalm 65:5-7** – By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness, O God of our salvation... the one who by his strength established the mountains, being girded with might; who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves.

3. Psalm 107:23-29 – Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters; they saw the deeds of YAHWEH, his wondrous works in the deep. For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight; they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end. Then they cried to YAHWEH in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.

C. But that was Yahweh, the *creator* of Leviathan – the *creator* of the sea – the one who *alone* has power over the dragon.

D. So then who is this Jesus who has just been asleep on a cushion in the stern of the boat (cf. Luke)?

Verse 27 – And the men marveled, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?”

A. Matthew says that “*the men* marveled” which is very highly unusual when he’s actually referring to the disciples (cf. v. 23).

✓ It’s as though Matthew says: “And the [mere **mortals**] marveled, saying, ‘*What sort of man is this*, that even winds and sea obey him?’”

B. Mark says: “And they were filled with great fear.”

1. Luke says: “And they were afraid, and they marveled.”

2. If they were so afraid of the uncontrollable chaos of the storm and the raging sea, **how much more** should they fear the one who rebukes the monster of the sea and tames the dragon with a *word*?

C. And so the story ends with a *question* because *the answer to the question is the whole point and meaning of this historical event.*

1. When we can answer *this* question, *then* we will also be able to answer the question we began with: “Who is this man who *commands* a disciple to *follow* Him with absolute, uncompromising allegiance, and who will not even *accept* anything less?”

2. Who is this Jesus who has just been asleep on a cushion in the stern of the boat?

3. “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?”

4. He is the **God** of the Old Testament!

5. He is Yahweh Himself – in the flesh. He is the Creator of the sea.

6. He is the one in Isaiah who **stirs up** the sea so that its waves roar (Is. 51:15), and He is the one in the Psalms who **stills** the roaring of the seas so that the waves of the sea are hushed (Ps. 65:7; 107:29).

7. That’s who Jesus is.

Conclusion

A. Remember Mainline Bob?

1. Remember how Mainline Bob is more concerned with the Christ of faith than with the Jesus of history?
2. When Mainline Bob reads this story he sees truth clothed in myth.
3. He believes that when he comes to this story, he should peel away the myth to discover the truth that it carries.
4. So for Bob, it is most likely that Jesus did not actually calm an actual storm (that's the myth). But in the end, that doesn't really matter.
5. What matters is the spiritual *truth* that the myth was meant to convey.
6. And this truth is that when we turn to "Jesus", He can calm the storms of our lives.
7. For Mainline Bob, this is what Matthew was trying to teach us in this passage.
8. *But* that application of this story is *necessary* for Bob only because he doesn't believe that the story is historical.
9. The *problem* is that many evangelical Christians who reject Bob's understanding of the Bible are constantly borrowing Bob's applications of the Bible.
10. Why is this? Because for some reason we feel that Bob's applications are more *relevant*, and perhaps even more *meaningful* than what Matthew intended.
11. My desire is that God would help us to see and feel the relevance of His Word *as it stands*, and on its *own* terms.

B. Since this event happened in history, we can know that Jesus is "no less that God himself, worthy of worship, irrespective of when and how he chooses to use that power in our lives" (Blomberg).

1. Because the fact is, as those who are commanded by Jesus, we are **safe** whether we live or die – whether the storm consumes us, or whether the storm is stilled (Jn. 12:25; Rev. 12:11).
2. So why should we **ever** be afraid? Where is our **faith**?
3. We learn from the calming of the storm that to follow Jesus is to follow *God*.
4. To obey Jesus is to obey *God*.
5. So can you see that when Jesus issues the *command*, "Follow Me", it's a *gracious* command?
6. It's a gracious command just *because* it is uncompromising, all-encompassing, absolute, and sovereign.
7. The Jesus who *commands* us is the God who created Leviathan, and who **holds** us in His hands – ordaining all things (even the fury of the Sea) for our good (cf. Rom. 8:28-29).
8. As those who have received the *command* to follow Jesus, we have to *constantly* be asking and answering the question: "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"
9. And what I love about this question is that it's also the *answer*.
10. What sort of man is this? Well He's the one who even the winds and sea obey.
11. Why are we *ever* afraid? ... Where is our faith?!?
12. Let us **obey** Him, and let us *worship* Him!

Comparison Chart

Mark 4:35-41

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.”

And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him.

And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion.

And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?”

And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

Matthew 8:18-27

Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, **he gave orders** [commandment] to go over to the other side.

And a scribe came up and said to him, “Teacher, **I will follow you** wherever you go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” Another of the disciples said to him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “**Follow me**, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.”

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

And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep.

And they went and woke him, saying, “**Save us, Lord; we are perishing.**”

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.

And the men marveled, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?”

Luke 8:22-25

One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.”

(Luke 9:57-62)

So they set out,

and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger.

And they went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we are perishing!”

And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, “Where is your faith?”

And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, “Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?”