

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
December 28, 2014

Lesson Text: Matthew 14:22-36
Lesson Title: In Awe of Christ's Power

Introduction

The Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus Christ as King of the Jews, the long-awaited Messiah of Israel. Writing to his predominately Jewish audience, Matthew, a Jewish tax-collector who became a follower of Christ, records event after event convincing his readers that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Matthew records Christ's genealogy, baptism, teaching, parables, and miracles all to the degree that anyone who heard him teach or witnessed his miracles should have stood in awe of Christ's power. But that was not the case with many of the Jewish people.

When Jesus saw that he was being misunderstood, misinterpreted, and rejected by the Jewish people, he turned aside from the general population to focus on teaching his disciples. He taught them in the open fields using nature as his stage and everyday life to emphasize his points of truth. On the occasion in Matthew 14:22-36, Jesus used the Sea of Galilee to teach his disciples some valuable lessons and demonstrate to them is mighty power.

On two occasions, the disciples thought they were going to perish while on the Sea of Galilee. The first occasion is recorded in Matthew 8:24. On this occasion their boat was "*covered with the waves*" and Jesus "*was asleep.*" The second occasion in our lesson text finds Jesus absent from their boat. In both situations the disciples ultimately stood in awe of Christ's power and were convinced that he was the Son of God.

Christ's Power and Our Difficulty (Matthew 14:22-24)

The Sea of Galilee is a body of water 7 x 13 miles, located 600 feet below the level of the Mediterranean Sea. The sea is usually calm but can quickly turn violent as winds turn it into a boisterous body of water. This happened when Jesus sent the twelve across the water toward Capernaum just after he had fed the five thousand.

Verse 22

"And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away."

The word “constrained” means Jesus made them “get into a ship” and “go before him unto the other side” of the water. It is possible that the disciples viewed the recognition of Jesus by the crowd after the feeding of the five thousand as positive feedback that he could now move forward to be king. But that wasn’t God’s plan at this time (John 6:14-15). Furthermore, the crowds would not make Jesus king. That was in God’s hands!

The text indicates that the disciples obeyed and boarded “a ship” to cross the water. Obedience to Christ is always beneficial but it can also create difficulty. At Jesus’ word, they attempted to cross the sea. Little did they know that their obedience would place them directly in the path of a challenging storm.

Application: Obedience to Christ does not exempt God’s children from life’s difficulties.

Verse 23-24

“And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.”

When the “multitudes” who were following Jesus had been sent away, Jesus “went up into a mountain apart to pray.” The disciples are on the water in obedience to Christ and Christ is alone on the “mountain” in communion with His heavenly Father. Matthew tells us that “he was there alone.” The word “alone” means our Lord was intentionally by himself, on the mountain, with the heavenly Father.

The fanaticism of the multitude that wanted to make him king was treated by our Lord as nothing less than temptation to get ahead of the Father’s will. And there is nothing that helps in times of temptation like prayer. We can stand in awe of Christ’s power over the sea in this text. But before we do, we should stand in awe of Christ’s prayer life.

“But” of course is that one word that makes life swing in so many directions. The “ship” on which the disciples were crossing the water was in the middle of the sea and being “tossed with waves.” The word “tossed” means “tormented, vexed with pain.” Christ said nothing to the disciples about a storm when he instructed them to “get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side” (v.22). Of course, he knew what they didn’t know. He knew what they didn’t need to know.

“Contrary winds” says it all. “Contrary” means “opposite, antagonistic.” The “wind” was a sailor’s friend in those days but now it was the disciple’s greatest enemy. Life has a way of turning things around for us. Things that should be an asset quickly becomes a liability.

Application: In life's difficulties we sometimes lose sight of Jesus. The disciples are on the sea where it was impossible to see the Lord. But Jesus was on the mountain above them and never lost sight of them. In Mark's Gospel, Mark tells us that Jesus "saw them" (Mark 6:48). Stand in awe of where He is even today. He is seated in heaven making intercession for us while we face life's difficulties (2 Chronicles 16:9; Hebrews 7:25).

Christ's Power and Our Opportunity (Mathew 14:25-26)

Jesus had calmed storms before (Matthew 8:23-27). But that was during the day while he was in the boat. This situation is much different. It is now "evening" (v.22) and he is not onboard with his disciples. They will learn that his power is not limited to day or night, when he is with them or when he is away.

Verse 25

"And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea."

Standing in awe of Christ's power means that we recognize his ability to intervene in our situation. It was "in the fourth watch of the night" or somewhere between 3 and 6 a.m. that "Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea." The "fourth watch of the night" is the darkest hour just before dawn. At the point of their exhaustion, He came. He had watched from the mountain above and waited long enough for them to experience the full force of the storm and their own helplessness.

"Walking on the sea" means our Lord has power over gravity and authority over creation. Men are not able to naturally walk on water. The law of gravity won't allow it. Jesus is no mere man. He is God incarnate. The One who created the water now walks upon it with complete control. There is nothing that can prevent Christ from coming to his own in time of need. We should stand in awe of that kind of authority and power.

Application: Standing in awe of Christ's power means that when we are at the end of ourselves our Lord will always come. His promise is "...I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).

Verse 26

"And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear."

When the disciples first saw Jesus “walking on the sea, they were troubled.” The word “troubled” means “agitated.” They thought Jesus was “a spirit” or a ghost. So, “they cried out for fear.” Keep in mind they are in a terrible storm in the darkest time of the night and they have no expectation that anyone knows where they are. And then, all of sudden, someone or something is approaching their ship. Is it any wonder that they initially failed to recognize Jesus?

Application: If we are going to stand in awe of Christ’s power we must learn that with every difficulty that comes in life there is also an opportunity to know our Lord better. We stand in awe of Christ’s power to have authority over the things that would destroy us.

Christ’s Power and Our Victory (Matthew 14:27-36)

It is comforting to know that although the disciples had spent much time rowing and fighting the storm that Jesus wasted no time in revealing himself to them. Walking on a trouble sea is indeed a miracle reserved only for Jesus who is the Master of the sea. Speaking to troubled disciples is also a miracle reserved only for Jesus who speaks like no man ever spoke (John 7:46).

Verse 27

“But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.”

Sometimes it is hard to hear in a storm or difficulty of life. Try to imagine the noise of the sea and the waves. Try to imagine how the fear of the disciples and the sight of what they thought was a ghost would have limited their ability to rationally comprehend all that was taking place. But then, “Jesus spake unto them...” At first, they failed to recognize him (v.26). But now, that familiar voice and that always present content, “Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.”

When Peter heard the words, “It is I,” he would have instantly identified those words to Jehovah of the Old Testament (Isaiah 43). Jesus is identifying himself to Peter and the disciples as the covenant keeping God of the Old Testament.

Only Christ has the power to speak to his children with words of comfort and hope. It was not time for Jesus to explain the storm or why they were going through the storm. It was time for him to give them encouragement and hope. It was time for him to speak to what was taking place *within* the disciples.

Question: Can you remember a particular storm or fear within your soul that Christ has calmed? If so, worship Him for that calm He created.

Verse 28 -29

“And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.”

At this point, Peter becomes the central figure in the story. And whether or not you interpret Peter’s request and walk on the water to be *faith* or *foolishness*, you must admit he was a man who dared great things for the Lord.

“If it be thou” are not words of doubt. If Peter had thought the one on the water to whom he spoke was anyone other than the Lord he would have never made the request to join them. Certainly Peter knew this was no “ghost.” What person in their right mind would want to go join a ghost? Jesus’ response, “Come,” indicates that Peter’s request was pure, not self-serving as some might suggest. The word “Come” also indicates Jesus approved Peter’s walk on the water.

One writer suggested that Peter enjoyed being so close to the Lord that he bumped into Jesus every time he stopped! There is probably a lot of truth in that statement. Knowing Peter and reading his request to go to Jesus and the Lord’s invitation to “come,” indicates that Peter felt it was safer to be on the water with Jesus than in the boat without him.

When Peter “came down out of the ship” he actually walked on the water. It is doubtful that Peter fully realized what he had asked Jesus to allow him to do. But as he “walked on the water, to go to Jesus,” he was doing what Jesus had given him permission to do and he was doing what Jesus had done. Peter is walking in victory because of Christ’s power. At this moment in Peter’s life he is living in obedience and faith in the power of Christ.

How was Peter able to walk on the water? The answer is that what Christ commands, he enables. Christ said, “Come,” and Peter “walked.”

Verse 30

“But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.”

Once Peter got out onto the water things appeared much different than what he expected. Matthew says, “When he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid...” In the ship Peter was totally focused on Jesus and getting to him. That has been Peter’s goal all along. Peter’s goal was not to walk on water. His goal was to get to Jesus. That’s what he wanted when he said, “bid me come unto thee” (v.28) and “to go to Jesus” (v.29).

Outside the ship Peter “saw the wind boisterous.” He also “was afraid.” The result was that he began “to sink.” The natural tendency to “sink” when you’re trying to walk on water had been there all the time. Peter’s faith and obedience to Christ who bid him to “come” had overridden the power of sinking. But now Peter’s doubt made him capable once again of sinking under the power of creative order.

Peter’s cry, “Lord, save me” indicates three very important truths that each of should never forget. One, it indicates that Peter knew he was sinking. That may seem like a logical conclusion but it is one that so many today are totally ignoring. The power of Christ to help us and save us from sin and ourselves is only beneficial when we acknowledge that we need it. Second, it indicates Peter knew the One who has authority over every situation. Peter addressed Christ as “Lord.” It is the Greek word *kyrious* {koo-ree-os} meaning “master, owner.” Peter acknowledged and recognized Christ as the Master of the sea, the owner of the water, the controller of the circumstance. There is no pride in Peter’s heart or dependence on self. Third, short prayers are effective!

Verse 31

“And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?”

Instantly Jesus reached out to Peter, “caught him” by the hand and said unto him, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” Our Lord’s question, “Wherefore didst thou doubt,” must have caused Peter to think about the long night of toiling and rowing, the winds, the waves, the storm, his request to go to Jesus, and Jesus’ invitation to “come.” Peter must have been exhausted from all the energy expended in an effort to stay afloat in the ship. Add to that the appearance of what he and the others initially thought was a ghost and it may be understandable as to why his “faith” had become “doubt.” What he saw, felt, heard, and imagined all had an impact on his ability to walk by faith in response to Jesus’ words.

Sometimes we “doubt” or waiver in our faith because of who we are and where we are in life. It is never okay to “doubt” the Lord or let our faith become weak but we must admit that is possible because of our human sinfulness and weakness.

Application: Peter’s doubt is a reminder to all of us that our faith can be shaken. Doubt can sometimes become very powerful. Even in the midst of Christ’s mighty power.

Verse 32

“And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.”

These very personal and intimate words indicate that our Lord led Peter back to the ship and they both entered the vessel. Upon their entry, “the wind ceased.” It should be noted that before Jesus calmed the storm he personally rescued Peter and reunited with the other disciples. Our Lord has power to rescue us and calm our fears.

“The wind ceased” are words that suggest the winds were in subjection to Jesus all the time. It’s as if they were created and came on this occasion for the purpose of the disciples training. When the Master of the “wind” was finished demonstrating his power, “the wind ceased.” It stopped.

Verse 33

“Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.”

As the frightening storm came to an end the disciples “worshipped him.” They respond differently to the storm and Christ’s miraculous power to calm it than they did to the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. Mark tells us “*For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened*” (Mark 6:52). But now, they are led to “worship.”

The word “worshipped” is the Greek word *proskyneo* {pros-koo-neh-o}. It means “to kiss the hand, to prostrate oneself in homage and reverence before another.” This “hand” that had stretched out to rescue Peter (v.31) is now being kissed by the disciples in pure worship and adoration. They had experienced the storm. They had experienced the fear. They had watched as Peter walked and began to sink. They had heard the words of Jesus and witnessed the walk back. All while the winds blew and the waves filled their vessel. And they had also experienced the “cease” of it all.

Verse 34-36

“And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret. And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased; And besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.”

The disciples arrived on the other side of the Sea of Galilee just as Jesus had said (v.22). They were now in the “land of Gennesaret” which was a small area outside of Capernaum. Jesus probably intended to spend some quiet time with his disciples after all the excitement of the previous day and night.

If Jesus wanted some quiet time it didn't last long. "When the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased..." Jesus had already worked miracles of healing in that area but obviously there were many more who were sick and in need of his healing. The people believed in Jesus' power to heal. They believed that if they could just "touch the hem of his garment" that they would be "made perfectly whole." This had already occurred with the woman who had an issue of blood (Matthew 9:20-22).

Our Lord had just demonstrated his power over nature and now he demonstrates again his power over sickness and disease. The motives of the people in coming may have been selfish while some may have been sincere. Either way, our Lord had compassion on them and honored their shallow and weak faith by granting to them the physical healing they desired.

Conclusion

Do you sometimes feel like you're all alone? Do you feel like no one sees or cares? Do you feel hopeless and powerless in the circumstances of life? If so, you're not the first person to feel that way. Peter and the disciples were in that very same situation. Ironically, it was being in that situation that gave them the opportunity to learn more about the power of Christ. And your situation, whatever it may be, is an opportunity for you to stand in awe of Christ's power.

The power of Christ is greater than any need we might have. His power is available to recognize us in our difficulties, reach us in our distress, and rescue us from our dangers. The words of our lesson text this week remind us that we should all stand in awe of Christ's power. He has power over nature, doubt, and disease. He created all things and all things are subject to his power and authority. He is worthy of our worship.

Happy New Year!

Amen.