

Prayer

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for the caring way in which You deal with us. For in reminding us of our failings and revealing our errors, You also offer us the opportunity of healing and the hope of salvation. May we never be afraid to follow Your advice when dealing with our problems, and may we prove to be worthy servants of the Kingdom, and of each other. We ask this through Your name, Lord Jesus: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Reflect on those things that have gone wrong in recent days. Repent before the Lord and seek where possible to put right what has gone wrong

On-going prayers

- **Pray for disenfranchised people throughout the world:** *Pray today for the people of New Zealand who have been hit by an earthquake and have lost loved ones, homes and all they possess.*
- *Praise God for books, for novels, poetry, biography and the many different categories of books readily available for us to read*
- *Pray about the effects of alcohol on young people, especially due to drinks that are targeted at them with cheap prices.*

Meditation

Show Yourself to us, Lord God, again and again;
Prove to us Your passion for all You have made.

Through creation, display the authority of Your Word;
Through awesome deeds, demonstrate Your total control.

Through forgiveness, confirm the brilliance of Your love;
Through salvation, make known Your eternal faithfulness.

Through healing, release the power of Your touch;
Through deliverance, disclose Your rule over Satan;

Through prophecy, uncover Your timeless purposes;
Through justice, expose the impartiality of Your heart.

Reveal Yourself to us, Lord God, again and again;
Show that You care for Your world, both now and forever.

Bible passage - Luke 8:22-25

²² On one of those days Jesus got into a boat with His disciples, and He said to them,

‘Let’s go over to the other side of the lake.’

So they set off, ²³ and Jesus fell asleep while they were sailing. Then a sudden storm descended on the lake, and they were swamped with water and in great danger. ²⁴ So they went to Him and woke Him up, shouting

‘Sir, Sir, we are lost!’

He got up and rebuked the wind and the rough seas; they stopped, and the sea was calm. ²⁵ Then He said to them,

‘Where is your faith?’

Fearful and amazed, they said to one another,

Bible Study

Review

So far in Luke's Gospel, Jesus has miraculously healed a number of people and set them free from demons; for example, the story of the unclean demon (4:31-41), the leper (5:12-16), and the man with a withered arm, (6:6-11). Now, for the first time, Jesus demonstrates His authority over nature with a powerful miracle controlling the weather, and He saves the disciples from near peril during a storm on Lake Galilee.

Many people find miracles hard to stomach. They fail to see why God should need to intervene in the world in order to make Himself known, except perhaps in miracles of healing, where there is a clear motive of compassion. For them, miracles in which Jesus uses the forces of nature to make a point are much harder to understand. Here, Jesus challenges the disciples about their faith. But does He really need to manipulate the forces of nature merely to challenge the disciples about spiritual growth?

The answer to this question must surely be 'yes'. In the not too distant future, the disciples would need to come to terms with both Jesus' death and also His resurrection. The first will be an awful tragedy, but the second an immense miracle. To prepare for this, there are a number of Gospel stories in which Jesus spends time helping the disciples come to terms with the fact that He would die (Matthew 16:24f. Luke 9:27 etc.). It should not be surprising therefore, that Jesus performed miracles such as this in order to challenge and build up their faith, and help them understand that not only was God's power greater than they could imagine, He was also willing to use it. On the 'richter' scale of miracle power, Jesus' resurrection is surely somewhat higher than stilling a storm on Lake Galilee!

The incident came on the disciples unawares, and they were certainly scared. Some of them were experienced fishermen and they knew how to sail a boat, but they were also experienced enough to know that storms could arise quickly on Lake Galilee. Winds could quickly funnel down through the adjacent valleys and violently toss the shallow waters of the Lake. So when they were caught in the middle of the lake in the midst of a furious squall, they knew their lives were in danger.

Jesus, however, was asleep while the storm raged around him. The disciples quickly woke Him and told Him they were lost. This was more a cry of panic than a call for help, so Jesus, who was unruffled because of His confidence in the Father, was right to question the disciples' faith. In the course of His ministry, Jesus had been impressed by the faith of several people, those who brought a paralysed man to Jesus (5:20f.), the gentile centurion (7:9), and the woman who anointed Jesus (7:50). Jesus was now looking for such qualities of faith within those who were closest to Him, that is, the disciples. They had responded to His call but they had yet to declare their faith in Him.

It may seem strange that the disciples did not seem to have the faith for the occasion, for we tend to think of them now as men of great faith. Indeed the equivalent story in Matthew's Gospel includes Jesus' rebuke of the disciples in these words, '*Oh you of little faith!*' (Matt 8:26). Clearly, Jesus recognised the immense faith of some of those who came to Him for healing and deliverance, but He was also willing to work with the disciples in order to build up their faith. They would then be ready to trust in God when the time came.

The stilling of the storm marked an important point on the disciples' journey with Jesus. Whatever perils they faced, or evils that surrounded them, Jesus was ready to help them, to rebuke or teach as necessary, and ultimately help them have a real, and trusting relationship with God, through Him. It was only after Jesus died that the disciples, and later the apostle Paul, began to speak about the importance of faith in the same way we do today (see Romans 1:16,17, 3:21f.). Faith grows from small beginnings.

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- Miracles through water in the Bible
- Deliverance from evil
- Lessons of faith

Notes on the text and translation

Significant phrases

V22 '*So they set off*'

Other translations:

'so they put out' (NIV)

'and they launched out' (NKJV)

The Greek word here is an entirely general one which in this form means simply 'getting on with something'. It is best therefore to avoid a nautical term because there is none in the text.

V24 'Sir, Sir ...'

Other translations:

'Master, Master ...' (NIV, NRSV etc.)

All the other translations agree on this translation, however, it is helpful if we look at alternatives. The Greek word for 'master' is 'epistatos', which is a general form of address for someone of high status, it does not refer to a teacher or religious leader. Today, we use the term 'sir' in a similar way and no one uses 'Master' as a form of address, so this is why I have used 'sir'. Importantly, the disciples do not call Jesus 'Lord' (Greek 'kurios'), with everything this implies. As the study suggests, the way they address Jesus is an important reflection of their faith.

V24 'He got up ...'

Other translations:

'then He arose ...' (NKJV)

'And He woke up ...' (NRSV)

Strangely, the Greek word 'diegeiro' means 'arise', 'get up' and also in the sense of a wind arising, 'grow rough'. This verb adds colour to the story in Greek, for there is a literal parallel between the wind 'getting up and growing rough', and Jesus 'getting up' to deal with the problem!

Going Deeper

Miracles through water in the Bible

Throughout the Bible, we find evidence of God working in miraculous ways through water! To begin with, God's first miracle was the creation of the world, which was done in the midst of *the waters* (Genesis 1:1-3), and from this point onwards, the Bible speaks of a very close relationship between water and life. Of course, this is observably obvious, for without food and water, people starve, become dehydrated and eventually die. So, when Elijah came to Israel, he did so at a time of drought, which symbolised Israel's lack of faith in the God of their forefathers. It is easy to forget that Elijah's great battle against the prophets of Ba'al was all about making sacrifices to God in order to gain the blessing of water and end the drought (1 Kings 17,18,19). Elijah's feat on Mt Carmel is one of the great Old Testament miracles; vast quantities of scarce and precious water was thrown upon an altar, before God blessed it and came upon the altar in fire!

The most famous Old Testament miracle is the deliverance of God's people through the Red Sea. After leaving Egypt, Moses led Israel towards the wilderness, and towards the Promised Land, but they were chased from behind by Pharaoh's army, and obstructed ahead by the waters of a sea. In the famous story (Exodus 12), Moses led Israel to their salvation through The Waters of the Red Sea. For many reasons, this great event became a powerful reminder of God's saving grace, celebrated by Jewish people each year by the Passover feast. The more that is said about this great event, the more its connections with the death of Christ and the salvation of all humanity become exposed, and it seems that it is God's intention to bring salvation through water.

This theme is continued in the story of the prophet Jonah. The whole of the story found in the book of Jonah is far more complicated than we imagine, and it contains fascinating comment on both God's love for His own people and for the whole world. Yet the best remembered part of this great biblical book is the story of how Jonah tries to flee from God, is thrown into the sea, and is saved so that he can go and prophesy to Nineveh. Again, salvation comes through water and in a famous verse of the Old Testament, Jonah says *'deliverance belongs to the Lord'* (Jonah 2:10).

It should therefore come as no surprise to us that Jesus looks for the faith of the disciples in this story of the 'stilling of the storm'. As the disciples thought about what has happened to them later on, they may well have realised that God was working through this miracle to keep them safe. It is a small example of what lay ahead, and ultimately, they would be *'saved by faith'* (Ephesians 2:8).

Deliverance from evil

In ancient times, it was commonly believed that the waters of the sea were a 'godless place'. This partly explains why in Genesis, God is described as '*dividing the waters*' (Gen 1:2f.). It also explains why Jonah fled to the sea when he wanted to escape from God, for by going there, Jonah believed he was getting away from God. Now although this was a popular belief that the sea was evil, people generally felt that this was true of the vast Mediterranean Sea, rather than the small and beautiful Lake Galilee. True, the lake was known for its squalls, but it had no reputation like that of the Mediterranean Sea. For this reason, it is likely that when the storm broke upon the boat, the disciples panicked. For them, it was as if the forces of evil have been unexpectedly unleashed against them; they were used to storms on the lake, but this was fiercer than they would have expected. We might not react like this today, but this is what we should expect of the disciples.

Various passages of Old Testament Scripture speak of the sea as an evil and dangerous place, and in some texts it represents the place from which people are saved, and a place that God will conquer and rule.

'Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea ...' (Psalm 46:2)

'In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more. May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. May his foes bow down before him, and his enemies lick the dust.' (Psalm 72:7-9)

'awake, awake, put on strength ... was it not You who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep ... for the ransomed of the Lord to pass over?' (Isaiah 51:9-10)

As with many texts, the 'stilling of the storm' may contain some hints about spiritual warfare. If the sea represents evil, then how much more can we interpret the wind and waves as a demonic manifestation, seeking to destroy both Jesus and the disciples. Forces were indeed at work attempting to destroy Jesus' mission, and among these we should remember the opposition of the Pharisees, and the opposition of Herod Antipas, who had imprisoned John the Baptist (7:11-35).

As far as Luke's Gospel is concerned, the nature of such opposition was of little significance. Luke tells the story to emphasise the commanding authority of Jesus, and the importance of the disciples' faith. To this day, no Christian need fear the forces of evil for they cannot separate them from God's love and care. Christ reigns supreme despite the havoc created by evil, and the Christian can exercise authority over it by faith in Christ.

Lessons of faith

This incident is the first occasion in Luke's Gospel where we read about the disciples' faith. The word 'faith' has only occurred previously in Luke's Gospel in stories of individuals who have had faith in Jesus for healing or deliverance (see quotes given in review above). The 'stilling of the storm' introduces the subject, and continues throughout the Gospel (12:28, 17:5f. 18:8 etc.) until the story of Jesus' Passion. Before being taken away to die, Jesus prays for the disciples, especially for Peter, to whom he says '*I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers*' (22:32). It is therefore not surprising, given the emotional intensity of everything that happened in the days prior to Jesus' death, that after he was raised, Peter realised the importance of faith. So when the people ran to Peter at Solomon's Portico after a lame man has been healed (Acts 3: 6), Peter said these words:

To this we are witnesses, that by faith in His name, His name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you. (Acts 3:15-16)

It may seem that in his letters, Paul describes faith in complicated ways (e.g. Romans 3:21-26), but there is a direct link to each through the faith of Peter, the man who first openly declared that he believed Jesus was the Messiah (Matthew 16:16f., Luke 9:20). Yet Peter had to learn faith, and his first Lesson came on a boat on the Lake Galilee.

To begin with, the disciples were not even able to call Jesus 'Lord' (8:24), they addressed him with a more common word, something like 'Sir' (see translation notes above). So at this point in time, their faith was more like obedience, but Jesus was calling them to trust Him personally. Now today, we are used to hearing about the faith by which we are saved, so it can be helpful to look here at how faith was built up in the disciples to the point that they could confess Jesus as the Christ.

The faith Jesus sought from His disciples at such an early point in their relationship was not the complex faith of one who recognised Jesus as Messiah. That would come of course, but Jesus wanted the disciples to start by trusting Him completely, and know that God was in control of their lives. We do not have to squeeze this passage very hard to discover such straightforward theological truth, and it is invaluable. If those who journey through life yield to the guidance of Christ, then their faith will indeed grow substantially to the point of public confession of Christ, but it starts with a simple trust in Jesus, and an acceptance that God is the

One who has made the world and controls it. He is the one who 'commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him' (8:25).

Application

Miracles can be a thorny subject to Christians. Some would say they have not come across the miraculous in everyday life, yet others see miracles all around them quite readily. To a certain extent, this is understandable, because people see things differently. One person will see a disease clear up quickly, and give thanks to God for a miracle; but another will give thanks to God but not call this a miracle, rather, the natural workings of the human body.

It is important that Christians should not beat each other up about such things. The reference points for our understanding of the miraculous must surely be two events of world history. Firstly, creation itself, which is a miracle of God's love and grace, and secondly, the miracle of the Resurrection. Christians must surely accept that both these life changing events are miracles. Then, in the light of God's clear involvement in the history of His world, it should not be surprising that from time to time, He does things that we cannot explain, for He wields great power and authority beyond our understanding. God's people may argue about whether certain events are miraculous or not, but they should surely agree about this in principle.

There may be times when because of the pressures of life, we find ourselves in the middle of a storm, figuratively speaking. It may seem to us that the church is asleep, that God is asleep, that our pastor is asleep, and anyone who might help us is asleep. The truth is that God, through Jesus Christ, is awake and ready to help us. In this wonderful story, the disciples call out to Jesus from the midst of their frailty and 'little faith', but Jesus' rebuke is not dismissive, it is constructive. He wants to build up their faith, and in the same way, we should always accept Jesus' mild rebuke if we are to grow in faith. Faith is a wonderful thing and it grows from simple trust in the One who is our Lord and Saviour.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Can you think of similar situations to the storm in this story, in which you have found yourself calling out to the Lord to help? How does this passage help you understand what happened?
2. Share with one another in your group, as appropriate, about occasions when you have felt that in the midst of danger, it is as if Jesus is asleep.
3. How does God show His command of the natural world today?

Personal comments by author

It is helpful to know that Jesus had to work hard at helping the disciples have faith. Most of us readily feel that God has had to work hard, in order to bring out our faith. Despite their slow start, however, the disciples did in fact grow to become men of great faith, and they did so from small beginnings. In them, the parable of the mustard seed was proved to be true. When I feel uncertain about what lies ahead, I need to be reminded that in this life, my faith is sufficient for salvation; but it is a work in progress before I am made complete before the Throne of Grace. Thanks be to God.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- Look back over the last year, and write down a list of those occasions when you have felt as if you are in a 'great storm'. Ask yourself this question, how have these difficult events helped you to grow in faith?
- If evil seeks to disrupt God's work by creating storms, how is Satan at work today? Keep a careful watch on what happens, day by day, and pray for God's people to have faith sufficient for each day.

Final Prayer

Come close to us, Lord Jesus, and hear our heart's cry. Listen to us when we are close to despair because we cannot understand things that have gone wrong. Understand us when we feel trapped by everything that

happens around us, and do not know where to turn in order to do what is right. May we know your presence so close to us, Lord Jesus, that we never despair of your guiding hand and loving touch. We praise you.
AMEN
