

Focus Text

“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?” **(Matthew 8:23–27, ESV)**

1. Presence of Peace

“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.”
(Matthew 8:23–24, ESV)

As Jesus departs from Capernaum, they set sail on the lake of Galilee. A mighty storm quickly came over the lake, and the small fishing boat they were sailing on began to be pushed around by the waves and lightning. Matthew is giving us two stories in one here. First, we see the same type of story in Jonah as he was fleeing Nineveh. Matthew reminds us that Jesus is not fleeing the mission field; He’s going forward. This reminds us of the previous challenges Jesus faced, showing us that He is a man with no rest. Secondly, Jesus is sleeping peacefully despite the storm, but the bad behavior of nature means little to the creator of all things. Jesus rests in peace because He trusts God’s things. As the commentators rightly point out, this is the expectation for all Christ followers. That we should strive for a relationship with the Lord so close that no storm can rob us of our peace, for we, too, trust in God as Jesus does.

“Matthew identifies the cause of the problem as a σεισμός. This word means ‘a shaking’, and is normally applied to an earthquake rather than a storm.¹⁰⁰ He has most likely chosen the word because its generality allows readers to think in terms of the many kinds of disturbance that may threaten their own lives.¹⁰¹”¹

¹ 100 BDAG, 918, have a couple of texts in which σεισμός appears to be applied to a storm. The related root σαλ(ευ)- is applied to the sea in Pss. 95:11; 97:7; Jon. 1:15; Ps. Sol. 6:3.

¹⁰¹ Luz, Matthäus, 2:27, focusses this too narrowly on inner psychological states. The widespread ancient use of danger at sea as a metaphor for a broad range of threats to human well-being facilitates generalisation (from the OT see Pss. 18:16–17; 65:7; 69:2–3, 15–16).

Nolland, John. 2005. The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

“The image of the sleeping Jesus is modeled after the sleeping divine king, the sleeping God taking his divine rest. His sleeping indicates not powerlessness but the fullness of absolute rule [cf. Gnllka, Matthäusevangelium I]”²

2. Plea of Faith

“And they went and woke him, saying, “Save us, Lord; we are perishing.” (Matthew 8:25, ESV)

Matthew is painting a different scene with the disciples. While Jesus is sleeping soundly, resting in the comfort of God, the disciples are frantic and willing to wake up their Lord Jesus to save them. Matthew is foreshadowing in this text what makes them think that Jesus can do anything in this situation? In their desperation, they go to the only person they believe can save their earthly lives.

As Methodists, we can see this story play out from the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, who, while traveling to Georgia from London, was caught in a terrible storm. Wesley, like the other English passengers, was panicking just like the disciples. But the German Moravians had peace and were singing hymns as the boat shook from the storm. This was the point where John realized that his faith in Christ was not assured. He was told to preach faith until he had found it, and then, once he had faith, to preach it more boldly! One question we need to ask ourselves in these two stories would be, “If you were on Jesus’ boat, or Wesley’s ship, would you be in panic or in peace?” May God grant you a deeper faith!

“The disciples’ conviction that they are perishing stands in contrast to Jesus, until disturbed, ‘sleeping like a baby’ through the storm.¹⁰⁷ It is this contrast that prepares us for the difference between Jesus’ response to their request and to that of other suppliants throughout this section.”³

² Gnllka, J. Gnllka, Das Matthäusevangelium, HTKNT 1/1, 2, Freiburg, 1986, 1988.

Matthäusevangelium J. Gnllka, Das Matthäusevangelium, HTKNT 1/1, 2, Freiburg, 1986, 1988.

¹ J. Gnllka, Das Matthäusevangelium, HTKNT 1/1, 2, Freiburg, 1986, 1988.

Davies, W. D., and Dale C. Allison Jr. 2004. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew. Vol. 2. International Critical Commentary. London; New York: T&T Clark International.

³ 107 Cf. Lv. 26:6; Job 11:18–19; Pss. 3:5; 4:8; Pr. 3:23–24.

Nolland, John. 2005. The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press

“John Wesley encountered a group of Moravian Brethren during a voyage to Georgia in 1735-1736, which profoundly impacted his life[1][2]. While on board the ship Simmons, Wesley was impressed by the Moravians' faith, particularly during severe storms that frightened many passengers[1][3]. In one instance, as the ship was battered by a storm and taking on water, the English passengers panicked, but the Moravians calmly sang hymns[2][3]. Wesley noted the stark contrast between the terrified English and the peaceful Moravians, who declared they were not afraid to die[2][4]. This experience led Wesley to recognize a depth of faith he did not yet possess, despite being an ordained minister[4]. The Moravians' humility, servitude, and unwavering faith in the face of adversity deeply challenged Wesley, ultimately contributing to his spiritual transformation and the subsequent Great Awakening in England and America[2][4].”⁴

3. Power Over Fear

“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.” **(Matthew 8:26, ESV)**

Jesus asks them the question we are wrestling with: why did they have no faith in God? Then he rebuked or commanded the sea to be still. As we reflect on the Roman Centurion's assessment of Jesus, we see His divine authority shining through. Every part of creation must submit to its Creator. Jesus has commanded, and the storms obey. When we look at Jesus throughout these stories, it is crucial to see Him as the King of the Kingdom of God. God owns the whole world and can call it to attention at any time.

“The situation may be terrible, but the disciples' terror is a mark of little faith. It indicates that they have lost sight of the reality of the power and presence of their Lord.¹⁰⁸ When this happens, appropriate action on the basis of faith becomes impossible. The present episode illustrates, however, the point already made in 6:30, that God does not withhold help even from those whose faith is small.”⁵

⁴ [1] Wingeier-Rayo, Philip. 2025. John Wesley and the Origins of Methodist Missions. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.

[2] Goll, James W., and E. M. Bounds. 2007. *Lost Art of Intercession Expanded Edition: Restoring the Power and Passion of the Watch of the Lord*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image.

[3] Hutton, J. E. 1909. *A History of the Moravian Church*. Second Edition. London: Moravian Publication Office.

[4] Goll, James W., and Mahesh Chavda. 2016. *The Lost Art of Intercession: Restoring the Power and Passion of the Watch of the Lord*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image.

⁵ 108 I am echoing the language of Luz, Matthäus, 2:30, but he means, I think, the presence of Jesus; I mean the presence of their Father in heaven.

Nolland, John. 2005. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

4. Perception of Divinity

“And the men marveled, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?””
(Matthew 8:27, ESV)

The conclusion of this story is the disciple marveling at Jesus. One aspect that makes this story more powerful is its ancient religious context. Israel’s most feared opponents in the Old Testament were the Canaanites. The disciples would have been familiar with their religious philosophy and the Genesis story. Yam is known to be the god of chaos, but represented by the thrashings of the sea. Ba’al is the chief deity in the Canaanite religion, and Ba’al was the storm god. What has made Israel great and powerful is that Yahweh, Israel’s God, did not need to thrash about and fight the gods of the sea to tame its chaos. In Genesis, God merely speaks, and the whole world comes into order without a fight. Jesus, in one command, reenacts this very story that every Israelite knows. Both Ba’al and Yam stand no chance against Israel’s God! What makes this story so powerful is that the undercurrent is a divine declaration. Jesus is making a statement about who He is. No human could stop the chaos gods. No mortal can command the sea! Yet, Jesus doesn’t plead, beg, or fight to halt chaos; instead, He commands it to be still, and the chaos and storms cease under His divine control.

These stories, friends, are why the disciples stare slack-jawed. Because they knew Jesus had spiritual authority. He has healed and cast out demons in God’s name. But no one besides God Himself could command the waves to be silent. Matthew is revealing to us that Jesus is God and His command is all-encompassing!

“Yam, also known as Yamm, is a deity from ancient Canaanite mythology associated with the sea and chaos. In Ugaritic texts, Yam is described as the god of rivers and seas, representing the chaotic power of water[1]. He is often portrayed as a sea monster or serpent, closely linked to the concept of Leviathan[1][2]. In Canaanite mythology, Yam was initially considered the king of all gods but became tyrannical, leading to his defeat by the god Ba’al and subsequent exile[1]. This conflict between Yam and Ba’al symbolizes the struggle between chaos and order, a theme common in ancient Near Eastern creation myths[1][2]. The Hebrew Bible often refers to Yam (translated as “sea”) in ways that suggest a personified force of chaos that must be subdued by Yahweh, drawing parallels to the Canaanite myths[3]. However, it’s important to note that in Israelite religion, Yam is typically depersonified, represented as the sea itself rather than a distinct deity, while retaining its characteristics of unruliness and power over humankind[3].”⁶

⁶ [1] Adams, Victoria, and David von Schlichten. 2020. *Redefining Job and the Conundrum of Suffering*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock.

[2] Barry, John D., David Bomar, Derek R. Brown, Rachel Klippenstein, Douglas Mangum, Carrie Sinclair Wolcott, Lazarus Wentz, Elliot Ritzema, and Wendy Widder, eds. 2016. “Chaos.” In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

[3] Cargill, Robert. 2023. *The Cities That Built the Bible*. HarperOne.

“Ba'al, also known as Hadad, was a prominent storm god in the Canaanite pantheon, particularly revered in Ugarit[1][2]. As the "Rider of the Clouds," Ba'al was depicted as a powerful figure wielding a club of thunder and a spear of lightning, embodying both destructive and beneficial aspects of storms[2]. His voice was associated with thunder, similar to YHWH in Hebrew tradition[1]. Ba'al's role as a rain-bringer was crucial for fertility in arid agricultural regions, making him a popular deity[1][2]. In Ugaritic mythology, Ba'al engaged in epic battles, notably against Yam (Sea) for divine kingship, which symbolized the conflict between order and chaos[2][3]. This mythological narrative reflected the natural cycle of seasons, with Ba'al's victory ensuring the arrival of autumn rains after the summer drought[3][4]. Despite not being the creator god (a role attributed to El in Canaanite religion), Ba'al was considered the champion of order and responsible for maintaining the earth's cycles[3].”⁷

Application

This week's challenge is to see Jesus as the King of Kings!

Spend daily time in prayer with an attitude of awe and reverence. There is nothing wrong with enjoying the personal relationship we have with the Triune God, but it must be balanced with respect and awe. Amen!

⁷ [1] Cargill, Robert. 2023. *The Cities That Built the Bible*. HarperOne.

[2] Der Toorn, Karel Van. 2006–2009. “Baal.” In *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, 1:368. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.

[3] Atwell, James E. 2004. *The Sources of the Old Testament: A Guide to the Religious Thought of the Hebrew Bible*. Understanding the Bible and Its World. London; New York: T&T Clark.

[4] Kugel, James L. 2020. *The Great Shift: Encountering God in Biblical Times*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.