

Bi132 The Gospels I

Lesson Bi132-27 Power over Nature

As a follower of Jesus, does it seem like you are tested in similar ways over and over again? You may even cry out to God, “Please Lord, help me get this lesson right; I am tired of being tested again and again!”

The disciples had just experienced the miracle of the feeding of more than 5,000 people—an amazing miracle that had begun with a desperate situation. In today’s lesson they become part of another miracle, but this one left their hearts full of fear. They still had not learned to trust God in a difficult circumstance. In the end, however, their faith in Jesus was strengthened. We see that down through history the faith of believers is strengthened by difficulties they encounter. The purpose of tests or trials is to show that faith is essential for survival. The strengthening of faith is a part of God’s plan for all his followers. Therefore sooner or later God will allow each of us to face tests.

Immediately after feeding the 5,000 Jesus asked his disciples to get back into the boat. They were to go on ahead of him to Bethsaida while he dismissed the crowd. But after leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified.

Immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take courage! It is I, don’t be afraid.”

“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

“Come,” he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”

Think about this. First Jesus saved Peter from drowning and then corrected him concerning his little faith. What was the difference between Peter and the other disciples on the issue of faith that night?

Then Jesus and Peter climbed into the boat with the others, and the wind died down. Those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever he was. And wherever he went—into villages, towns, or the countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed (Matt 14: 22-36).

One other time, somewhat earlier in the disciples' journeys with Jesus, he had already shown his power over natural forces. It had happened on the same sea. When evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took Jesus along with them in the boat. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (Mark 4:35- 41)

In both these stories Jesus demonstrated his power over nature. In both cases he used it for his own purpose—to call the disciples to a greater faith in him. In the episode that took place earlier, Jesus was there with them all the time sleeping on a cushion. After stilling the storm Jesus asked the disciples why they had no faith. This was a serious charge, but he meant to make them all think about their response to a small trial. He wanted them to more fully understand the scope of his power. He was testing them to see if they trusted him.

In the episode that took place later, it was clear that the disciples had not learned the lesson about Jesus' power the first time. So, another storm came and the winds blew against them. Jesus had sent both the crowds and the disciples away so he could have time alone with the Father in prayer. During this time Jesus certainly prayed for the crowds. More importantly, he prayed for the disciples, that they would mature, especially in their faith.

The disciples feared ghosts and spirits rather than trusting Jesus. Jews believed that the spirits of departed relatives might stay in the area after their death. Straining at the oars, their response on seeing Jesus was fear. This is not unusual, when God reveals his power. Remember the experience of Moses at the burning bush? He feared when he heard God's voice. When Jesus appeared walking on the lake he said to the disciples, "It is I, don't fear!" This could also be translated, "It is me, the 'I am,'" the same name of God revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3:14). The disciples seemed to grasp this meaning, for when the storm stopped, they worshipped Jesus saying, "Truly you are the Son of God" (Matt 14:33).

Peter's apparent lack of faith is often the center of attention in this story. But remember that of all the disciples, only Peter asked to join Jesus on the waves and stepped out of the boat. If they had all asked, Jesus would have certainly invited all of them to come. Peter stepped out in

faith and Jesus was glad to see his response, but sad when Peter soon began to doubt. When Peter called, Jesus rescued. As long as Peter kept his eyes on Jesus, he was safe.

This story is **important** because it illustrates that the faith of believers grows through times of fear and difficulty.

The **main truth** of this story is that God is more concerned about our growth in faith than protecting us from stressful events. We need to learn to trust God in all situations.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. When the disciples were fearful of the storm and saw Jesus walking on the water, what did he say to them?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said Jesus told them, "Take courage! It is I, don't be afraid," you are correct.
2. When Peter asked to join Jesus walking on the water, what did he say to Peter?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said Jesus told Peter, "Come," you are correct.
3. What was the purpose of Jesus in allowing them to experience the danger of the waves of the sea, not once but twice?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds]. If you said that Jesus was more concerned about their growth in faith than protecting them from tests and trials," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn these two stories by memory so you can tell them to someone else. After telling the stories ask this question, "What difficult or stressful experiences have you had recently that have caused your faith in Jesus to grow?"