

Jesus' Authority Over Nature: Calming the Sea
Matthew 13:53, 8:18; 23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25

Introduction

Have you ever considered how important the weather is to man? It is one of the most common topics of conversation. How cold was it last night? What is the temperature now? How hot will it get today? What did you think of that last storm? How much rain or snow did you get? I sure hope tomorrow is a nice day so that I can get some things done. The weather is such an important factor in so many of our daily activities that a lot of money is spent in trying to predict it. In addition to the National Weather Service with its thousands of reporting stations and many people working for it, private industry also hires meteorologists to predict what the coming days will bring. Equipment used for this endeavor ranges from simple thermometers, barometers, hygrometers and anemometers to satellites and complex computer systems. News agencies compete with each other in trying to convince their audiences that they have the best weather predicting team - hence names like "*accu-weather*" are used to suggest that they are accurate in their predictions. (Although my conclusion from comparing many of the weather predictions with what actually occurs in our area is that instead of calling their reporting services such things as "*Fleet*," "*Accu*" or "*Action*" weather, they should be more honest and call them "*Fleeting*," "*Here's a guess*" or "*Wait and see*" weather).

Certainly weather is an important topic and not just for planning for agricultural, construction, travel and recreational activities, but also for safety when storms are coming. The early warning systems that track hurricanes and tornadoes save countless lives each year. But man would like to do more than just predict the weather. Man would like to control it and be able to bring rain to areas of drought and weaken storms that flood the countryside. Man has made various attempts at this such as the large fires built by the charlatans who billed themselves as "rainmakers." Modern cloud seeding programs in California claim an 8-15% increase in precipitation over a season, but it only works if conditions are already just right, and man still has no means to even slightly diminish the strength of on-coming storms. Weather prediction itself is in reality as much art as science, as much guess as forecasting. Weather control is completely in the hands of God alone. Such is still true in our age of advanced technology, and it was even more obvious at the time of Jesus. Only God can control the weather, and Jesus uses that fact to demonstrate that He is in fact God in human flesh.

A Long Day - Matthew 12:22-13:52; Mark 3:20-4:34; Luke 8:1-21

Out study this morning begins where we left off last week in our study of the parables in Matthew 13. We must remember that Matthew writes thematically and not chronologically. Jesus has had a very busy day that began with teaching the people that had gathered to Him at a house in Capernaum and where He had cast out a demon and healed a man that was both blind and mute. This escalated into a confrontation with the Pharisees when they accused Him of doing this by the power of Beelzebul. Jesus rebuked them and then condemned for blaspheming the Holy Spirit. He also warned the crowd about being like them in seeking additional signs for Jesus had already presented them enough evidence in His teaching and miracles for them to believe. Jesus then left the house and went down to the shore of the Sea of Galilee where another crowd gathered. Jesus got into a boat and put out a short distance so He could speak to people gathered along the shore. He spoke to them only in parables so that He could reveal truth to His followers while hiding it from His enemies.

At this point I need to go back to look at a parable I inadvertently skipped that is only recorded in Mark 4:26-29. It is another parable based in agriculture and especially compliments the parable of the sower or soils and the parable of the wheat and tares.²⁶ *And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; ²⁷ and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows—how, he himself does not know. ²⁸ "The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. ²⁹ "But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."*

In the parable of the sower, the focus was on the effect the four particular soils had on the seed sown upon them with only the last one actually producing a crop. In the parable of the wheat and tares, the focus was on the toleration of the farmer for the tares that had been sown by an enemy and contaminated his field of wheat. He would not separate the two until the harvest when the tares would be gathered and burned and the wheat gathered and stored. In this parable the focus is on the seed itself. The farmer sowed the seed, but he could not cause it to sprout and grow. The seed accomplished that by itself without the farmer's aide for the farmer did not even know how that actually occurs. He just knows that it does, so he sows the seed with faith that it will sprout and grow, which is why he can go to bed at night and sleep in peace. The particular seed described is a small grain such as wheat which sprouts and grows a leaf blade first, then heads when it flowers and from which the grain forms.

The point of the parable is simple. It is God, not man, that causes the growth. Paul makes this same point in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7 saying, *I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.* That is why evangelism that seeks to manipulate people into supposed "decisions for Christ" is not only foolishness in trying to force something to happen that only God can do, but it is also dangerous because it ends up planting a lot of tares instead of wheat. We preach the unadulterated gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ by speaking the whole truth in love as we are commanded, but then leave the results in God's hands.

Getting you to raise your hand, walk the aisle or pray a particular prayer does not make you a Christian any more than pinning wings to your back would make you an angel. Salvation from sin and receiving forgiveness and eternal life by faith in the Lord Jesus is ultimately a matter that each individual must work out with God. No one can do that for you for as John 1:13 makes clear, belief in Jesus' name to become a child of God does not come by inheritance through blood line, the will of the flesh, or the will of man, but of God.

After Jesus finished teaching the parables to the multitudes, He went back with His disciples to the house in Capernaum where He explained some of the parables to them and told them additional ones.

Departure from Capernaum - Mt. 13:53, 8:18; Mk 4:35-36; Lk 8:22

We now come to Matthew 13:53, *And it came about that when Jesus had finished these parables, He departed from there.* Matthew 8, Mark 4 and Luke 8 record the events that happen next. Matthew 8:18 states, *"Now when Jesus saw a crowd around Him, He gave orders to depart to the other side."* Mark 4:35 adds, *And on that day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side."* By this time Jesus has had a very long day and could use some rest, yet another crowd is gathering. Even though it is now evening and the sun has set, Jesus wants them all to leave and go to the other side of the lake.

From Luke 8:22 we learn that Jesus and His disciples get into a boat. We assume this reference to His disciples is specifically referring to the twelve that had been traveling with Him (Luke 8:1). However, there were more that were following for Mark 4:36 points out that though they were leaving the multitude, *"other boats were with Him."* These may have included some of the women that were also traveling with Jesus and the twelve (Luke 8:2) and / or some of the multitude that had access to the boats.

A Great Storm - Matthew 8:24, Mark 4:37-38; Luke 8:23

The three accounts of what happens while they are out on the lake describe a terrible storm and a very tired man. We begin with Luke 8:23, *But as they were sailing along He fell asleep; and a fierce gale of wind descended on the lake, and they began to be swamped and to be in danger.* Matthew 8:24 gives a little more description of this fierce storm and how tired Jesus was, *And behold, there arose a great storm in the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves; but He Himself was asleep.* Mark 4:37-38 records that Jesus was in the stern of the boat asleep on a cushion and gives an even more vivid description of the storm, *And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up.*

I think any of us could understand that after such a long day of ministry, Jesus was very tired. That certainly would have been one of the reasons He wanted to get away from yet another crowd that was forming by going to the other side of the lake. After they all get in the boat and begin to sail across, Jesus falls asleep on a cushion in the stern of the boat.

The description of this storm is that it was very violent. Luke and Mark both call it a *lai:lapV* / *lailaps*, a windstorm, whirlwind or squall with Mark adding the adjective *mevgaV* / *megas*, great, intense, terrible to it. Matthew adds the same adjective to his description of it as a *seismovV* / *seismos* from which we get our word “seismic,” an intense shaking. The storm is of such violence that it describes the sea as “shaking.” Luke does not describe the waves but does say the boat was starting to swamp. Matthew states the boat was being *kaluvptw* / *kaluptō*, covered or hidden by the water. Mark describes both saying the waves were breaking over the boat so that it was already filling up. The waves were so high they were going over the boat and rapidly filling it with water.

Such storms were not unusual on the Sea of Galilee. It is a very large lake about 13 miles long by 7 1/2 miles wide. It sits in a depression 686 feet below sea level with mountains all around except at the extreme southern end where it drains out as the Jordan river. To the immediate north is Mt. Hermon rising to 9,200 feet. Air currents moving across the area would be forced over Mt. Hermon where they would cool, becoming denser and heavier. They would then crash through the warmer, lighter air that would be over the Sea. The cool air rushing down and the warm air rising up create winds that then bank off the sides of the hills surrounding the lake and begin a swirling motion which fits the description of it as a *lai:lapV* / *lailaps* by Mark and Luke. These storms would come suddenly and whip the sea into a very dangerous tempest. Such was the storm that the disciples found they were in that night.

It is reasonable to assume that the boat they were in was a fishing boat belonging to one of the local fisherman. These men would usually launch out at night casting or dragging their nets in different fishing spots. They would bring their catch onto the shore in the morning. Since some of the disciples were fishermen on that sea, they were well acquainted with the lake, their boats and the danger of the storms that could suddenly arise.

On this particular night the wind was howling and the waves were crashing over the boat to the point that it was in danger of being swamped, yet Jesus is still asleep. This displays the humanity of Jesus. He was fully God, but also fully man with a body that was subject to physical exhaustion. On this occasion He is so tired that even with the boat being tossed around, the wind howling about Him and getting wet with the waves crashing over the boat, He is asleep. The Creator of the world is sleeping soundly in the midst of a severe storm. Though as God He is omniscient, in His humanity Jesus is at this time oblivious to the turmoil surrounding Him.

Desperate Disciples - Matthew 8:25; Mark 4:38; Luke 8:24

Each gospel account has something slightly different about what happens next. It must again be pointed out that some of the disciples were fishermen. It is easy to understand someone who was not used to boats, wind and wave to be frightened by any storm, but this storm was so bad that even the fishermen were afraid because they knew the danger. Matthew 8:25 records, *And they came to Him, and*

awoke Him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing!" Mark 4:38 records, and they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" Luke 8:24 states, And they came to Him and woke Him up, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing."

Why such differences in what is recorded about what was said to Jesus? Well, in the middle of such a storm they would not have elected a spokesman to go to Jesus and wake Him up and speak on behalf of everyone. Notice that in each account that it is "they" and not a particular person that wakes Jesus up and speaks to Him. These men are in a panic and the differences are an accurate record of what different disciples were saying as they desperately sought help.

This was exactly the point that God wanted these men to come to. The disciples had run out of their own solutions for all their efforts had failed. Now they finally turn to Jesus, the one whom they have already seen heal the sick and cast out demons. In their great fear they still had a glimmer of faith in crying out to Jesus to save them.

Desperation is not necessarily bad, in fact, it is necessary when it comes to salvation since that is a basic description of what it means to be poor in spirit. You understand that you have no means by which to save yourself. You have nothing to offer or even bargain with, and so as a desperate beggar, you cry out to God for mercy and grace, and God lovingly responds and saves the repentant sinner. Many are those that have come to Christ through some overwhelming situation such as an illness, financial calamity, or a relationship in crises. The human efforts are failing and finally the person turns to God. He responds with grace to save and put the person on a new path with a new purpose in life. The trouble may or may not still be present, but the change to an eternal hope in God changes the reactions to and feeling about the situation.

However, the disciples did not need to be desperate and neither does the Christian, yet so often we are not any different from these disciples. Too often we are unwilling to call out to God until we reach the point of near hopelessness. We get so caught up in trying to do things our own way and live according to our own wisdom that it is not until God allows us to be in some situation of extreme difficulty that we will finally come back and call on Him for help and guidance.

It is common for people to worry and fret over physical illnesses, but Christians do not need to fall in that trap, yet when we do, the Lord may allow us to reach the point of despair so that we will place ourselves again in His hands and remember that this life is more than our physical condition. Asaph expressed that in Psalm 73 as he acknowledged that his flesh and heart might fail, but that God would be the strength of his heart and his portion forever. Physical decline is also the obvious direction of life and that decline of your physical condition as you age should force you to look for an eternal purpose for your existence. Most people fight that through middle age, but the increasing aches and pains and inability to do things you used to do should create in you a longing for the day of Christ's return when your body and all of creation will be redeemed from the curse of sin effecting them. You need not be desperate about physical decline and illnesses when you have a hope in God in the present that extends to eternity.

People also go through life plotting and planning for their own financial well being, and for many it is not until they come to so financial crises that they remember that they are dependent upon God and are only stewards of all that God has placed in their hands. Your material possessions are not to be the source of your security or pleasure. Your security and delight is to be in the Lord. Your material possessions are to be used to bring Him glory - not yourself, to extend His kingdom - not your own. Your treasure is to be in heaven, not here on earth. Why be desperate about the things of this life when God has already promised to meet all your real needs as you seek first his righteousness and kingdom? (Matthew 6:33)

The same is true of relationships. Every relationship you will have on earth is to be subordinate to your relationship with God and that even includes your spouse. Jesus is to be your first love. The wonderful thing about this is that all your other relationships will improve as a result because you

become less selfish and more giving. So why be desperate about relationships with other people when the most important relationship is secure and proven when Jesus died for you while you were still a sinner (Romans 5:8)?

Jesus' Calms the Sea - Matthew 8:26, Mark 4:39-40; Luke 8:24

The disciples reached a point of desperation and they woke Jesus up and cried out to Him to save them. Jesus answers them in Matthew 8:26, *And He said to them, "Why are you timid, you men of little faith?"* Jesus' question is rhetorical for He provides the answer. They are so timid and frightened because they have little faith. It is more of a statement of His own surprise, "How frightened you are, you men of little faith." Now before we condemn the disciples for their little faith we must remember their situation. They were experienced seamen who have come to the end of their abilities. The winds are howling and the waves are crashing over them. They are keenly aware that their lives are in danger. Most of us would probably react the same way and in fact do in so many similar situations. And yet the rebuke they received - and that we receive - is justified.

They had seen Jesus perform miracle after miracle demonstrating both His power and His compassion on mankind, and Jesus is in the boat with them. They understood this to at least some degree because they go to Jesus with a plea to save them. Jesus did not rebuke them because they woke Him up and requested help. The rebuke was of the fear that was driving them. They could have also just stirred the Lord from His sleep and asked Him to help based in a confident trust in Him rather than a fear for themselves.

They really had no justified reason for their fearful reaction even if Jesus had not been in the boat. How can I say that when it seems fairly reasonable to fear if you are about to be swamped and drown? From the human standpoint it is reasonable to fear, but from the godly standpoint it is not. Not only have they been with Jesus from six months to a year or so, but these men would have grown up with the Psalms and memorized many of them including such passages as Psalm 46:1-3, *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride,"* and Psalm 107:23-30, *"Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters; they have seen the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep. For He spoke and raised up a stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. They rose up to the heavens, they went down to the depths; their soul melted away in their misery. They reeled and staggered like drunken men, and were at their wit's end. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He brought them out of their distresses. He caused the storm to be still, so that the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad because they were quiet; so He guided them to their desired haven."*

They were men of little faith because they responded to the circumstances around them rather than to God's word. From the accounts in Mark and Luke it appears Jesus may have continued to talk to them about this even after He stopped the wind and calmed the sea. The reality is that those who trust God can be calm even in the face of death because they know it will mean being with God. Yet, how often are we just like these men when we react in fear to the circumstance around us rather than trusting God's word?

Jesus was a complete contrast to these men. They wake Him up in the midst of the storm and with the waves crashing all around and the boat being tossed to and fro and He calmly speaks to them. Jesus' trust in the Father is complete and it was demonstrated in His sleeping during the storm and His calmness after being awakened.

Matthew 8:26 describes Jesus taking action to fulfill their plea, *Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and it became perfectly calm.* Let me stress here that it is the wind and the sea that are rebuked and not any demonic force behind them. Next week we will see Jesus' authority over the demonic, but this text is stressing His power over nature. Mark 4:39 adds that Jesus' rebuke included saying, *"Hush, be still."* And the wind ceased (*kopavzw / kopazō* - movement ceases or stops) and the

surging waves became perfectly calm (galhvnh megavlh / galēnē megalē - unruffled surface of a body of water). This is not a gradual ceasing of the wind and waves for they both stop their movement at Jesus' rebuke. The immediate stopping of the wind would seem somewhat explainable since storms do sometimes leave as quickly as they come, but the calming of the sea is an impossibility except for God's intervention. The laws of physics demands that once the waves have been generated the force in them must be dissipated. The wind may stop, but the sea would be expected to remain in turmoil for some time, yet at Jesus' rebuke the sea becomes calm just as fast as the wind stops. God had intervened into nature.

Astonished Disciples - Matthew 8:27; Mark 4:41; Luke 8:25

The reaction of the disciples confirms this miracle for they were amazed and became fearful of what Jesus did saying to one another, *"What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"* Who is Jesus that He can command the winds and the water and they obey Him? All natural men are physical creatures and therefore bound by what we call the laws of physics. That is why the disciples were amazed at what Jesus was able to do. Though they had seen Jesus do miracles before it was still hard for them to grasp the fact that He is not a natural man. He is the Messiah, God in human flesh and therefore the only man that has authority to command nature to break the laws of physics and it must obey.

We should not marvel at Jesus' authority over nature since He is the one that created it. Colossians 1:16-17 states, *For by Him [Jesus] all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.* God is not in the box bound by the laws of nature, He is in fact outside the box and the one that is holding it together.

What is your reaction to Jesus? Do think Him still just a great teacher, a philosopher, an historical figure? or do you understand that He is God in human flesh? Are you fearful and fretting over the circumstance of your life? or are you learning to place your trust in Him? Have you called out to Him in your despair or are you still striving to do it on your own? Jesus said, *"Come unto Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28). Rest and calm that He provides even in the midst of the storms of life.

Sermon Notes: *Jesus' Authority Over Nature: Calming the Sea*
Matthew 13:53, 8:18; 23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25

Introduction

Knowing the _____ is important to man for many reasons

Man would like to _____ the weather, but is not able to do so

Weather control is completely in the hands of _____ alone - Jesus uses that to demonstrate His deity

A Long Day - Matthew 12:22-13:52; Mark 3:20-4:34; Luke 8:1-21

Jesus had a very _____: teaching, casting out a demon, rebuking the Pharisees, teaching in parables

Mark 4:26-29 *The Parable of the Seed's Spontaneous* _____

The farmer sowed, but the seed _____, grew, headed and matured on its own apart from the farmer

It is God, not man, that _____ spiritual growth - 1 Corinthians 3:6-7

Salvation from sin is ultimately an _____ matter between you and God - no one can do it for you

Departure from Capernaum - Mt. 13:53, 8:18; Mk 4:35-36; Lk 8:22

By evening, Jesus was tired, but another crowd was gathering, so He & disciples _____ Capernaum in a boat

Mark 4:36 - people in additional boats were still _____ Him

A Great Storm - Matthew 8:24, Mark 4:37-38; Luke 8:23

Jesus was so tired that He fell _____ in the back of the boat while they were sailing

A very violent wind storm (lai:lapV / lailaps) came upon them causing the sea to _____ (seismovV / seismos)

The waves were _____ and going over the boat causing it to become filled with water

Due to the geographical conditions, such violent storms were _____ on the Sea of Galilee

The disciples that fished that lake knew the _____ they were in from the storm

Jesus was so tired that He was still asleep in the midst of the storm - demonstrating His _____

Desperate Disciples - Matthew 8:25; Mark 4:38; Luke 8:24

In _____ they wake up Jesus and various disciples plead with Him to save them

Desperation describes the poor in spirit that _____ God for mercy - there is no other option for salvation

Christians do not _____ to be desperate about the things of life, but too often do not call on God until they are

People worry about physical illnesses & decline, but those should cause _____ in God & longing for heaven

Don't wait for financial ruin to learn _____ and trusting God to provide as you seek Him first

Your relationship with God is _____, and He proved His love in Jesus Christ

Jesus' Calms the Sea - Matthew 8:26, Mark 4:39-40; Luke 8:24

They were timid because they had little _____ and had come to the end of their abilities

Jesus rebuked them because they were letting _____ drive them

They had seen Jesus perform many miracles and knew _____ such as Psalm 46:1-3 and 107:23-30

Those who _____ God can be calm even when facing death - since they know they will be with Him

Jesus' complete trust in the Father is demonstrated in His being able to _____ even in the midst of the storm

Jesus rebukes the wind and sea, not _____ forces, saying, "Hush, be still"

The wind ceased (kopavzw / kopazō) and the sea became perfectly _____ (galhvnh megavlh / galēnē megalē)

The sea becoming calm _____ the laws of physics - God intervened into nature

Astonished Disciples - Matthew 8:27; Mark 4:41; Luke 8:25

The reaction of the disciples _____ the miracle - they were amazed and wondered about Jesus' identity

They had seen Jesus perform many miracles, but they still had a hard time grasping He was _____ and man

Jesus has authority over nature because He _____ everything - Colossians 1:16-17

You can find peace and _____ in Jesus even in the midst of life's storms.

KIDS KORNER

Parents, you are responsible to apply God's Word to your children's lives. Here is some help.

Young Children - draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch. **Older Children** - Do one or more of the following: 1) Count how many times the disciples are mentioned. 2) Discuss with your parents their reaction to both the storm and to Jesus commanding it to cease and your reaction to the things that frighten you.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Questions to consider in discussing the sermon with others. How important is knowing the weather forecast to you? Why is it important? How has man tried to control the weather? Is he successful? Why or why not? How does Jesus use His authority over the weather to demonstrate His deity? What had occurred on this day that ends with Jesus and the disciples in a boat during a storm? Explain the Parable of the seed's spontaneous growth? (Mark 4:26-29). What is its meaning? Does it have application today? Explain. Why did Jesus want to leave Capernaum that evening? Why would other boats go with Him (Mark 4:36)? What did Jesus do soon after they set sail? Why? Describe the storm that struck them? Why did it frighten the disciples? Why was Jesus able to sleep in the midst of the storm? Why do each of the gospel accounts record something slightly different that was said to Jesus after they woke Him up? What was the cause of their fear? Why is desperation a necessary part of salvation? Explain. Why is desperation by a Christian about the things of life unnecessary? What is the godly response to physical illness and decline? Why? What attitude should Christians have toward material possessions? Why? What is your most important relationship? Why? How should God's love enable you to calmly handle problems in your relationships with people? Why did Jesus rebuke the disciples with a rhetorical question? Give at least two reasons that Jesus would have expected them to act calmly even in the midst of a life-threatening storm? How did Jesus rebuke the wind and the sea? Describe the manner in which the winds and waves ceased? Why is this contrary to the laws of physics? What did it demonstrate about Jesus? How does the reaction of the disciples confirm this miracle? What is the source of Jesus' authority over nature? Why do the disciples have a hard time understanding and believing Jesus' identity? What do you think about

Jesus? Who do you believe He is? Why? What effect should that have on your life? What needs to change? What is your plan to pursue any needed changes what you believe and in the way you live?