

WHY DO YOU DOUBT?

Lesson Scripture: Matthew 14:22-33

Focus Scripture: Matthew 14:22-33

Key Verse: "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" Matthew 14:31 (NRSV)

MATTHEW 14:22-33 (NRSV)

22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.

23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,

24 but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.

25 And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea.

26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear.

27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

28 Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

29 He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus.

30 But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

32 When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

33 And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

MATTHEW 14:22-33 (KJV)

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.

23 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.

24 But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.

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

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.

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

28 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

29 And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

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

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes, without warning, life takes us on scary rides. Maybe you started a familiar adventure or project with the best of intentions. At first, all went well. Then, in a flash of time, you ran into potentially disastrous situations. From the joy of starting the adventure or project, you came face to face with horrifying physical, emotional, or financial ruin. What did you do? To whom or to what did you turn for help? In those terrifying times of life, it is comforting to know we have trusted friends who have both the love for us and the resources to rescue us.

This lesson addresses such a situation. It shows what fear can do to us. All

experiences we face in life affect us in some way. As it relates to faith in God, terrifying experiences and related events either drive us closer to God or weakens our faith in the Lord. For this reason, as believers, we must know for sure in our hearts that God loves us, and nothing can compromise that love. Daily, as we walk through the ups and downs of life, let

us remind ourselves that the God of the mountains is also the God of the valleys.

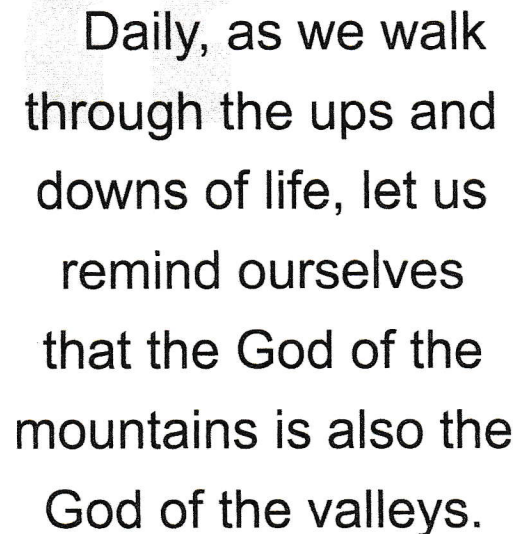
TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

In Lesson 2 we saw how Jesus rescued the disciples from a terrible storm on the Sea of Galilee. In this lesson, we look at a similar rescue mission in the same waters. But note a distinction. In the first rescue (Matthew 8), Jesus started in the

boat with the disciples. Here, Jesus is not with the disciples. Can you relate to this distinction? Maybe you can consider it in this way. The first instance is like when we are in a church service that focuses on praise and worship. In that inspiring atmosphere, we can feel secure in our faith and ready to

take on the world. However, when we are on our jobs and challenges arise, we may not feel “the presence of God” and thus think we have to face the challenges on our own.

We see another point of comparison in the background scriptures. Matthew’s story focuses on the disciple Peter. In Mark 6:45-52, the corresponding account



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highlights the group of disciples lack of understanding. However, there is no inconsistency between the two Gospel accounts.

The next point to note is the effect of the experience on the disciples. They worshipped Jesus probably for the first time as a group. What started as a chilling ordeal resulted in a glorious experience of thanksgiving and praise. In this there is a powerful lesson for us today. First, terrible life encounters can drive us closer to God. Second, we must be lavish in our praise and worship when God brings us through the valleys of life.

And what can we say about Peter's walk on the water, although it was brief? Does this mean we should go to the beach and try to walk on the sea? Maybe not. It shows that God will empower us to do amazing things. It teaches us God will do anything, even suspending the laws of physics, to rescue us from adversity when we call for help in faith.

Lastly, although Jesus rebuked Peter

for his lack of faith, the Savior still reached out to save the sinking disciple. When we pay attention to rebukes from God, we grow. A slap from God is like the slap we get from midwives at birth. It awakens us to the reality, power, and priorities of God.

SANKOFA

A feature of the rescue in the text is the unanticipated presence of Jesus. As we often say, God's help is always on time. In November 2007, this scenario played out again in Cape Town, South Africa. A British family on a holiday break was sailing with two friends in a V-craft jet boat. Without warning, the boat stalled and started to sink. This happened in an area known to have many sharks.

On the beach relaxing on the balcony of a cottage was 19-year-old Roxy Louw, a fashion model and good swimmer. She saw the family and crew in distress and jumped into action. Roxy grabbed her wetsuit, alerted the sea rescue agencies, and swam to the boat. Two off-duty lifeguards joined Roxy. She alerted

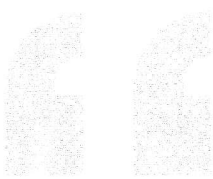
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the rescue experts and they responded quickly. Roxy's quick actions saved the passengers and crew of the sinking jet craft. Oh! were they grateful.

As with Jesus' disciples, the passengers and crew got immediate help they did not expect. This incident highlights the divine love and care that God extends towards us. That divine concern springs into action when we need it, even when we have no reasonable expectation of rescue.

CASE STUDY

Can you see yourself in the scary situation the disciples faced in the text? For a few minutes, pretend you are a disciple in that boat. What would you have done? Would you have panicked in fear of losing your life



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or would you have been brave and acted more rationally? Yes, it is easy to second-guess the disciples and explain how differently we would have responded. But can we be sure we would have behaved with more wisdom and less fear? To answer that question logically and honestly, we must know some of the

psychology of fear. Unless we train to do otherwise, most of our reactions to scary situations are impulsive and irrational. This is the reason airline pilots train in flight simulators. Likewise, army special forces train to condition their responses to danger. These experts know that it is easy to second-guess and assess reactions and outcomes outside of a calamity. But, in the heat of a crisis, people do not have

the time to assess possible outcomes. They do what their instincts dictate. The fear response is a natural response to preserve life. Unless trained to manage that response, we react to threats to life by instinct rather than logic. When our mind gets signals of a threat, whether real or not, it triggers the

release of stress hormones (cortisol and adrenalin). These hormones instantly put our bodies in a "fight or flight" mode. The mind then searches the memory banks for an appropriate strategy. If we need to fight, we look for the most effective weapons available. When flight is necessary, instantly we take what

appears to be the fastest, safest route from the danger. (Anyone interested in knowing more about this subject can consult a July 2006 article on Huffpost.com by Dr. Gail Gross, a human behavior expert.)

Such insights give us clues on how believers can handle crises. If we have a firm sense that God is in the situation with us, we feel more secure. As a result, the body releases less stress hormones. We are less likely to go into a panic, and can make logical choices.

Further, the more we accept that physical death is but the doorway to eternal life, the less impact scary situations have on us. In other words, through prayer and meditation, we can develop the same measured fear responses that pilots and soldiers achieve through training. Maybe this is a reason God is called El Shaddai ("the All-Sufficient One," e.g. Genesis 17:1). A firm trust in God preserves us in all situations.

LIFE APPLICATION

This is an excellent time to consider your convictions that Christ is always

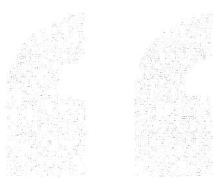
close by and will show up when you need him. In life, we face times when we are alone in both literal and figurative storms. To whom or what we look to for help will determine how well we weather those situations. Please consider this point in your meditations.

As believers, we should take reasonable precautions when we go on missions. Whether local, regional,

or international, these adventures in faith are part of our Christian mandate. Try as we may, we cannot escape the Great Commission. But we know that, by its very nature, mission work is risky. So, we should ensure we do the required spiritual and emotional training for these realities. Experienced

missionaries know the invaluable worth of this advanced preparation.

Lastly, we know that prayer must be a habit for believers. Yet, and this is sad to admit, some persons pray as a matter of rote. They lack the faith that God will hear and respond to their prayers. Take a few moments and reflect on this. To what



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degree do you believe that if you are in a crisis and appeal to God for help, the Lord will respond appropriately? Just a thought!

Questions:

1. What can we learn from Jesus' own prayer life?
2. What can we do that will help us not be distracted from our focus on Jesus even in the midst of a crisis?

3. What doubts exist that cause us to not fully trust in God's care for us?

CLOSING DEVOTION

Closing Song: "When the Storms of Life Are Raging," AMEC Hymn #420

Closing Prayer: Dear El Shaddai, help me to know for sure that as you showed up on the Sea of Galilee for the disciples, so you will do for me in my storms. In Jesus' name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

June 21-June 27

Monday	Isaiah 38:16-20 (Let's Sing of the Lord's Faithfulness)
Tuesday	Matthew 14:1-12 (The Baptist Dies for the Faith)
Wednesday	Matthew 14:13-21 (The Crowd's Hunger Satisfied)
Thursday	John 6:22-29 (Believe the One Sent to You)
Friday	Matthew 14:34-36 (The Sick Are Healed)
Saturday	Mark 13:9-12 (Speak Confidently to Civil Authorities)
Sunday	Matthew 14:22-33 (Savior of the Fearful, Doubter, Needy)