You of Little Faith, Why Are You So Afraid?

Matthew 8:18-34

Key verse:8:26 “He replied, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.”

There are four gospel books in the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each gospel has its own unique writing style, emphasis, and motivation. Matthew, a Jew, described Jesus as the Promised Messiah who would come as the King of the Jews. So he quoted the Old Testament more than any other gospel books. Last week Matthew testified Jesus’ healing ministry as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. Jesus came to take up our infirmities and bear our diseases as Prophet Isaiah had prophesied in Isaiah 53:4. In today’s passage Matthew again proves Jesus as the Promised Messiah. Jesus the Messiah is not a man of sorrow who is familiar with suffering, but he is the Almighty God who controls nature and commands spirits.

First, Jesus first, others second (18-22) In the previous story we learned that Jesus worked hard day and night. Verse 14 says that when evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to Jesus, and he drove out the spirits and healed all the sick. (16) Jesus was like an ER doctor who didn’t have time for a lunch break because of so many patients. Jesus realized that his disciples needed a break and he himself wanted to spend time with them apart from the crowd. So he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. Then a teacher of the law came to him and said**,** “***Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.***” (19) Generally speaking, teachers of the law opposed Jesus because he often rebuked their hypocrisy. But this teacher of the law wanted to follow Jesus. How did Jesus answer him? Look at verse 20. “***Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.***” What does this mean? What did Jesus want to teach the teacher of the law? He taught him the cost of following him. Following Jesus, becoming his disciples, is not a fancy dream, but a hard reality. To the eyes of the teacher of the law, following Jesus seemed to provide honor and security for himself. However, following Jesus is often ready to live humbler than foxes or birds. (Foxes have holes where they can sleep. Birds have nests where their babies wait. But Jesus had no house or shelter for himself.) Jesus lived this life. Since he started a messianic life, he traveled around to heal the sick, teach the word, find disciples, and so on.

People like to wear the necklace of a cross for decoration. But many of them do not know the meaning of the cross which they wear. Following Jesus is not a matter of decoration or recognition, but of determination to live or die with Christ Jesus. Through DL Moody’s inspiring sermon many college students determined to follow Jesus and volunteered to go out as missionaries. Some of them came to Korea which was an unknown mission field at that time. According to their report there were tigers and bears on the mountain, and people in the village lived like homeless. Preaching the gospel to them was not a fancy dream, but a hard reality. Some of them returned home, but most of them remained and were buried with their children in the land of Korea. In fact, they did not own any house or land in their mission field. They owned only a few square feet for their burial place. But they died with hope to go to the house of God. They held Jesus’ promise, “*My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you*?” (Jn 14:2) Living as missionaries and Bible teachers in this country is not easy. Some may be disappointed to follow Jesus. However, our present sufferings are not worth compared to the life of missionaries in Korea in the 19th century. Their life reminds us of Hebrews 11:15 which says, “*If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had the opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country–a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.*” Amen!

Look at verse 21. “***Another disciple said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father***.” Another disciple thought that he was better than the teacher of the law because he thought that he was ready to sacrifice everything to follow Jesus. So, he proudly asked Jesus to fulfill his duty as a son. How did Jesus reply? Look at verse 22. “***But Jesus told him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead***.” Jesus did not mean to dishonor our parents or ignore our duty or responsibility as a family member. Jesus taught us to honor our parents. Jesus meant here that the disciples must focus on Jesus and put Jesus as priority. Soldiers are called by their country to protect their country and people. Since they entered the army camp, they must focus on necessary discipline and duty as soldiers. They cannot come out from the camp for every family gathering or civilian affairs. Their priority is to fulfill their duty as soldiers. Jesus’ disciples are more than soldiers who were called to work for the kingdom of God. They have to focus on necessary spiritual training and to fulfill their duty. In order to follow Jesus they need self-control and spiritual discipline. This is what Jesus wants to teach us. Paul said to young disciple Timothy in his second letter to him, “*Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer.*” (2 Ti 2:3-4)

William Borden, a Chicago born Yale student, an heir of millionaire, accepted Jesus Christ through D Torrey’s message. In 1905 he volunteered for foreign missionary. Turning down an offer for a prominent position as a millionaire, he decided to go to Muslim world as a missionary. He wrote two words to his crying mother, ‘No reserve, no retreat!’ Borden gave up all the glory and comfortable life as an heir of a millionaire. Then he would not come back home from his mission field. Indeed, in Cairo Egypt he contracted spinal disease and died at the age of 25. But before he died, he added one more word in his letter to his mother, ‘No regret’. William Borden did not regret his life of following Jesus. Indeed he followed the life of Jesus who taught us today. Are you following Jesus as he taught us today? Are you ready to give up everything to follow him? Do you regret that you are called? Here is the answer. No reserve! No retreat! No regret!  Amen!

Second, you of little faith, why are you so afraid? (23-27) Jesus got into the boat and his disciples followed him. It was good for the disciples to spend time with Jesus without the crowd. In the middle of the lake, however, a serious problem arose among them. They met a storm. Look at verse 24. “***Suddenly a furious storm came upon the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping***.” The Lake Galilee is located around 680 feet below sea level. So, when the cold air blown through the surrounding mountains clashes the warm air on the lake, sudden storms occur like tornadoes.  The waves began to sweep over the boat. Peter, Andrew, James, and John were experienced veteran fishermen, still the storm was out of their control. At that time, Jesus was sleeping. So they went and woke him, saying, “***Lord, save us! We are going to drown***!” (25)

How did Jesus respond to the disciples’ desperate SOS? Look at verse 26. “***He replied, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid? Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.***” Jesus admired the centurion’s great faith saying, “*I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.*” (8:10) Now Jesus rebuked his disciples’ lack of faith. “*You of little faith, why are you so afraid*?” In fact, the disciples did not need to be afraid even in the midst of the storm because Jesus was with them. He was in the same boat. As long as Jesus was with them, they would be okay. They were afraid because they saw only the storm, not Jesus who was in their boat. In the middle of storms of life we must see Jesus, not the storm. When we see the storm, we become fearful. But when we fix our eyes on Jesus, we overcome fear.

Jesus was sleeping while his disciples were struggling for their life. Do you think Jesus was really sleeping? He might be sleeping because he was very tired of serving the crowd. He might pretend to sleep because he watched how his disciples overcame the storm. Whether he was really sleeping or not, what really matters is that Jesus always watches over us, listens to us, and takes care of us even in the time of storms. One day Jesus healed a paralyzed man and it was a Sabbath. So, he was accused by the Jewish leaders. Jesus said to him, “*My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working*.” (Jn 5:17) In this verse Jesus said that our Father God is always at his work, watching over his people, listening to them, and taking care of them. Psalm 121:1-8 says about this, “*I lift up my eyes to the mountains–where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip–he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep…The LORD will keep you from all harm–he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore*.” Amen!

We often think that God is sleeping in the time of our suffering. Some say that he may forget us because he is silent. But we must believe that God always watches over us and takes care of us. He is not silent or asleep, but always at his work. God fed 2 million Israelites in the desert for 40 years by sending manna from heaven. God is not sleeping but we are sleeping. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus’ disciples slept while Jesus was praying. America was in danger of being divided into two because of the Civil War. People in the North asked President Abraham Lincoln to pray to God to stand on their side. But Mr. President replied, “We must stand on God’s side because God always stands on our side.” In the storms of life we must not sleep, but pray. God wants us to trust in him and seek him in all situations. Amen!

Jesus got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. How did his disciple respond to this? Look at verse 27. “***The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this?” Even the winds and the waves obey him***!” By calming the winds and the waves Jesus revealed himself as God who controls nature. Indeed, he is the Son of God who created the heavens and the earth in the beginning. As the Almighty Creator God, controlling the winds and the waves is a piece of cake. Here we learn two things. First, Jesus can control our storm. Second, Jesus always works for the good of those who love him and follow him. No matter how difficult and life-threatening problems may rise among us, Jesus can control them. He is mighty to save us. Next, in all things Jesus works for the good. By controlling the storm Jesus taught them who he really is. They asked, “*What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him.*” To whom the winds and the waves must obey in this world? There is no man, but God alone.

In the time of hardship and trials people become despaired and see all things with a negative viewpoint. In the midst of the storm his disciples thought that they were drowning and their life ended under the sea. But Jesus didn’t think so. Jesus used the storm as an opportunity to discipline them to become great men of faith. The Jews thought that the darkest era of their ancestors was the age of slavery in Egypt for 430 years. Their life was misery itself to their eyes. But during those years God worked hard to make them become a great nation under the protection of Pharaoh. God worked hard to keep his promise with Abraham which he had made in Genesis 12:2-3. Historians say that the darkest era of Christianity is the Middle Age. So, some call it “Dark Ages”. Indeed, Christian (Catholic) churches became corrupt linked with wealth and authority. However, during those dark ages God worked hard for world salvation. God moved the heart of one Catholic monk, Martin Luther, to start the Reformation. While Martin Luther was exiled, he translated the Latin Bible into German so that many people around the world could read the Bible. Our God is not sleeping, but working hard for his kingdom and his glory. While Jesus was crucified and buried, people thought that Christianity was over. But it is not the case. During those days God worked hard for Jesus’ resurrection!

In conclusion there is no despair and failure in Jesus Christ. This is because Jesus died for our sins and rose again from the dead. This is because in all things God works for the good of those who love him. Following Jesus is not easy. It is like entering a narrow gate. It is costly, too. But when we follow Jesus, we experience the presence of God and the power of God. When we follow Jesus, we overcome storms of life. I pray that we all may become disciples of Jesus and spiritual generals whose names are written in the book of God’s history like William Borden and Sarah Barry. Amen!