

Useful Faith

Luke 8:22-25

Introduction

Power with a Purpose: What is the purpose of Jesus' miracles? The Gospel of John tells us "there are many other things that Jesus did," so many, in fact, that if "every one of them" were recorded "the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (Jn 21:25). This means that everything that has been recorded in the Bible is there for a reason. **Every miracle in the Bible is there to teach us something.**

- These aren't magic tricks meant to amuse the crowds, but signs meant to reveal Jesus' identity, character, and authority.

Teaching for Transformation: These miracles aren't spectacles to dazzle you. Plenty of people were wowed but the miraculous power of Jesus but never moved to surrender to his sovereign authority. When you truly grasp what these miracles mean (not merely what happened), it changes the way you live. **Miracles are not meant to wow us into amazement, but are meant to transform us into disciples.**

- There's a scene in the 19080 film *Superman* with Clark Kent (Christopher Reeve) and Lois Lane (Margot Kidder). She has figured out (or at least suspects to a highly confident degree) that Clark is (spoiler alert) Superman. To prove her suspicions, she jumps out of a window, confident that he will save her! There is no way she would behave like that if she didn't truly understand his identity.¹

Who is Jesus?: We've been on the "Who is Jesus?" Tour in Luke. And at each stop along the way, the questions to be answered are central to his identity.

- **John the Baptist:** "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Lk 7:20).
- **Pharisees:** "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" (Lk 7:49).
- **Disciples** (today): "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?" (Lk 7:25).
- These ultimately lead to the conversation between Jesus and Peter.
 - **Jesus:** "Who do you say I am" (Lk 9:20).
 - **Peter:** "The Christ of God" (Lk 9:20) (i.e., God's Messiah).
- This is the question I would hope all of us would answer: **Who do you say Jesus is?** "No one will ever ask you a more important question."²
 - If he's just a **prophet**, you'll take his advice but never follow his commands when they conflict with your desires.
 - If he's just a **teacher**, you'll borrow his lessons to help you succeed but never embody his wisdom that allows you live righteously.

¹ Neo (Keanu) in the Matrix is *able* to do all sorts of amazing things once he accepts the reality of the Matrix and his true identity.

² *Christianity Explored* (https://youtu.be/8lJa-PcEGE4?si=obT5_BohVpRd1_B5)

- If he's just a good **example**, you'll follow him when it suits your sensibilities, but you'll never sacrifice your comfort for his call.
- But if he is God become flesh, who sacrificed himself to save you. If he's King of Kings and Lord of Lords, you'll not only admire him, you'll worship him with all of your life.
- The idea that you can follow Jesus yet your life doesn't change contradicts the gospel. Participating in Christ means participating in all of him. The most countercultural truth of the gospel in our modern world is that you can change. The gospel changes us. Truly grasping who Jesus is not only changes our destiny but our daily life.

²² One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they set out, ²³ and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. ²⁴ And they went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. ²⁵ He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?"

1. Sleeping Jesus (vv. 22-24a)³

²² One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they set out, ²³ and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. ^{24a} And they went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!"⁴

Setting the Scene: Jesus and his disciples (maybe just the twelve, maybe the women and others) get in a boat. This would be a large fishing boat that could hold 15 or 20 people.

- Jesus immediately falls asleep as they set sail.
- The lake they are crossing is the Sea of Galilee. *Technically*, it is a lake (Luke), but it is called a sea (Matthew and Mark) for historical, cultural, and common-sense reasons.
 - It's 64 square miles in area, the largest freshwater lake in Israel. Because of its size, it has the appearance of an inland sea (e.g., the Great Lakes have beaches, storms, Coast Guard, etc.).

Dangerous Situation: Because of its unique geography (700 feet below sea level) but surrounded by imposing mountains (some as much as 9,000 feet above sea level), the cold air can zoom over the mountains into the warm lake below and create sudden and violent storms that would rival open ocean squalls (e.g., the Rocky Mountains surrounding Denver create severe turbulence and wind shear during takeoffs and landings).

- The storm is so bad that it threatens to sink the boat (filling with water).

³ Three points from Tim Keller.

⁴ This account occurs in all three Synoptics. Essentially the same in all three synoptics (minor wording differences in speech or description of storm), Luke simply says things a little more tersely.

- These fishermen, who have seen it all on this lake are afraid. When the professionals are afraid, you should be afraid (e.g., flight attendant).
- There is an urgency in their plea (Master, Master).
- They were being overcome by the storm and were in imminent danger.
- Nothing makes you feel as small and helpless as a storm (e.g., tornado, hurricane, tsunami, etc.). Despite all of our technological advances, we have no more “control” over nature now than they did thousands of years ago (e.g., storm gods, chaos, etc.). E.g., Jetta terrified in a storm).

Problem of Suffering: We naturally feel that if we’re following Jesus, we shouldn’t experience any storms. Spoiler alert: The storms are coming (today, this week, this month, this year, etc.). 50% of the pain of a trial is the surprise we have because of our misplaced expectation that we should go through life trial-free (Keller).

- Why am I always surprised when I get bad news from foster care? The health crisis is coming. The relational conflict is coming. The unexpected job loss is coming. Suffering is coming!
- It is a delusion to think that after we are saved everything will be easy. The Bible nowhere says such a thing and, in fact, says the opposite. The more you follow Jesus, the more guaranteed you will suffer: Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Tim 3:12). The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him (Rom 8:16-17).
- This is what Jesus tells us: I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33). The sleeping Jesus and the sovereign Jesus are not at odds with one another. We will suffer in this world, but we can also experience God’s peace at the same time.
- Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (Jas 1:2-4).
 - Our trials give us something important. They point us to dependence on Christ. They teach us about our own idols and weaknesses. They exercise the muscles of faith so we can grow our trust in God. They wean us from the temporary comforts of this world so we can know the eternal comforts of heaven. The darkness amplifies the light.

Where is Jesus?: All the while, Jesus was asleep. Their fear blinds them of the the meaning of Jesus’ sleep. They understand his sleep to be ill-timed and uncaring. E.g., “Don’t you even care that we are going to die?” (*paraphrase* Mk 4:38).

- God often *seems* asleep in our suffering. “Why are you sleeping, O Lord?” (Ps 44:23). “Why sleepest thou, O Lord” (KJV).

Jesus' sleep should reassure us that everything is alright (e.g., not just the flight attendant but the pilot). **If we're going to follow Christ, we have to start with the premise that he is right and knows what's best.** You can trust Jesus in the storm, even when you think he is asleep.

- Even though he has the power, God doesn't always act the way we think he should act (e.g., all of parenting).
 - If God is big enough to stop the storm, then he's big enough to have reasons you don't understand for not stopping it (HT Keller).⁵
 - There is a deep and universal knowledge that a good and all-powerful God exists. "He has put eternity into [our] hearts" (Ecc 3:11).
 - We know his power, we just don't understand his behavior. That's good, because if we understood it or could control it, then we'd be God.
- Being able to sleep in the midst of stress is a sign of trust that God is in control. The sign of trust is sleep: **Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep** (Ps 127:1-2).
- I think this is where the rubber meets the road: It's easy to say we trust God when the water is calm, but faith is meant to be useful when the waves are rough.
- "God can save, and he does care, but maybe he has something better in store for you than the safety of the shore. Maybe God has something in store for you that you can only experience if you follow him into the storm" (Walker, *adapted*). **Maybe the person he is making you is more important than the comfort you desire.**

2. Rebuking Jesus (vv. 24b)

^{24b} And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm.

Undeniable Power: Jesus displays his undeniable power by rebuking the wind and waves. He has already rebuked a demon (4:35) and a fever (4:39).

- He has power over the unseen and the seen, over death and life, and over nature and creation. "Our God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there's nothing our God cannot do."

Undeniable Identity: I have authority over my children because I am their **parent**, but I don't have authority over all children. **Teachers** have authority over their students because they have been hired for this job. A **police officer** has authority in a particular jurisdiction that is limited in scope and limited by the law. A **politician** has authority because they have been elected. All of us have authority that is derivative. In each instance, authority is **limited** by identity or **given** by a higher authority.

⁵ "If you have a God great and transcendent enough to be mad at because he hasn't stopped evil and suffering in the world, then you have (at the same moment) a God great and transcendent enough to have good reasons for allowing it to continue that you can't know. Indeed, you can't have it both ways" (Keller).

- This was my favorite story to tell in Mali because it proved Jesus was not just a powerful prophet or dynamic teacher but he was God become flesh. The only one who has the power to command creation is the creator.
- Jesus didn't ask God to stop the wind and waves, he spoke directly to creation as the creator. He doesn't pray to God, because he is God.
 - The God of glory thunders, the Lord thunders over the mighty waters... The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning. The voice of the Lord shakes the desert... The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forests bare (Ps 29:3, 7-8a, 9 NIV).
- The storms of your life only have power on loan from God. Take refuge in him, where no storm can wipe you out.

Undeniable Authority: But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand (Is 64:8).⁶

- If he is king of life and death, heaven and earth, and all of creation then he is king over me. He has the right and authority to call for and receive my complete trust and obedience.
 - Whatever he tells you to do, you should do.
 - Whatever he tells you not to do, you should not do.
 - Wherever he tells you to go, you should go.
- If Jesus is who he says he is and who he proves himself to be, then he is worthy of complete trust, **especially in the storms of life**. If he can calm this storm, he can calm your storm.

Unchanging God: "The disciples should be able to rest in God's care and to trust Jesus' ability to care for them" (Bock). Creation is under his control, so the disciples can trust they are under his care.

- Penny Illustration (Kathleen). Even the smallest thing can block out the light of the sun, despite the power and size of the sun (1.3 million Earths inside the Sun; marble to Beach Ball). The challenge is not to allow the momentary afflictions to eclipse the eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (2 Cor 4:17).
 - We often hold our problems so close that we can't see the power and promises of God.
 - The gospel gives us perspective so we can see the greater plan of God (e.g., football coach in the sky). Sometimes when we're too close to the action, we can't see clearly.
- Each storm is a temporary circumstance, God is an unchanging reality. Why base your life on changing circumstances (good or bad) rather than an unchanging God? "The secret is Christ in me, not me in a different set of circumstances." "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God" (Corrie Ten Boom).

3. Questioning Jesus (vv. 25)

⁶ Cf. Rom 9:20-21

²⁵ He said to them, “Where is your faith?” And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, “Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?”

Silly Disciples: I’m so thankful for these faithless disciples because each one of their blunders is an opportunity to see my own shortcomings and change.

- It is instructive to notice that Jesus, on multiple occasions, rebukes folks for having little faith (“O you of little faith”).⁷ In each instance, it is the disciples who have “little faith.”
- But even your weak faith, if it leads to Jesus, is valuable. Jesus may rebuke you for your lack of faith, but he will never reject you. Instead, he will save you and point you to a life of trust that is filled with joy.

Which Question: (1) The disciples ask the **identity** question: **Who is this?** This is an essential question because if you get this wrong, you’ll head in the wrong direction (“It doesn’t matter if you hit the target if you’re aiming at the wrong target”). (2) Jesus, however, asks a different question. He asks them, “Where is your faith?”

- His is a rhetorical way of asking why they are not using their faith in that moment. **Where is it hiding?** It’s an imminently practical question.
- Faith, at the end of the day, is not meant to be an esoteric, ephemeral, spiritual thing that we tout at worship services. **Faith is meant to be a tool we use amid the challenges of life.**

Nature of Faith: We have largely mistaken the nature of faith.⁸ Because faith is a gift that saves us, we have *wrongly* assumed it is an uncontrollable, automatic, almost magical feeling. The Bible describes it differently as a **confident conviction** (Heb 11:1), an **intentional action** (Mk 9:23-24), and a **deliberate choice** (Prov 3:5-6). We are told to **walk by faith** (2 Cor 5:7). While faith is a gift (1 Cor 12:9), like all gifts it can be grown, developed, and built up (cf. 2 Tim 1:6).⁹

- Jesus is saying this to the disciples: “It’s not that you don’t have faith, it’s that you’re not using it. Get it out of your pocket and put it to work.”
- They were being controlled by the situation.
 - They’ve seen Jesus teach with authority, raise the dead, heal the sick, and forgive sins. Nothing he has said has been a lie. Everything he promised has come true. They need to act like they trust him! Get your faith out and use it.
 - Respond with the truth of Jesus not the doubt of your situation.
- Faith is not an unrealistic hope or automatic feeling but is a deliberate action.
- Faith is applying what you know about Jesus!
 - When you are drowning in fear because of your scary circumstances, where do you turn? The bottle, the pill, the relationship, the retail therapy, the daydream, the escape, the anxiety, the worry, etc.
 - Do you stoke the fear, dwell on the uncontrollable, and feed the worry or do you turn to the only one strong enough to do something about it?

⁷ Matt 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8, 17:20

⁸ See Martyn Lloyd-Jones (<https://www.mljtrust.org/sermons/spiritual-depression/where-is-your-faith/>)

⁹ Think of athletic or musical gifts, they still can be neglected or nurtured and the differing results intense.

- Do you trust the one who is powerful enough to save you and compassionate enough to sacrifice himself for you?
- I am not trying to guilt you for worrying, shame you for fear, or condemn you for turning to the false comforts of this world. **I am inviting you to take all that truth you know about Jesus and put it to work.** I'm inviting you to turn to the one who can do something about it when things are at their worst.
- Take what little faith you have and put it in Jesus. The more you focus on him, rely on him, meditate on him, the more you can build your faith and the more you can enjoy the storms as they come.

Conclusion

So What?: C.A.S.E.

1. **Choose:** Choose faith. Refuse to be controlled by the situation. You can make a conscious choice to trust God in the midst of difficult circumstances. You can nurture self-control as God fills you with his Spirit. You do not have to let your circumstances dictate your emotional state.
2. **Apply:** Apply faith. Apply your faith to the specific situation. Take what you know is true of God's character and Word and apply it to your current circumstance. **Worried?** Read Matthew 6 and Jesus' reminder of God's goodness and why we shouldn't worry. **Afraid?** Read Luke 2 and God's reminder not to fear. Etc.
3. **Stand:** Stand in faith. Hold on to your faith. Focus on God's power, goodness, and control. Remind yourself that he cares for you. **Sing songs that reinforce gospel truths.** Plant your feet in the firm foundation of God's love and stand firm. **"Be steadfast, immovable"** (1 Cor 15:58). **"We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you"** (2 Chron 20:12).
4. **Edify:** Edify (build up) your faith. You can build up your faith. You can grow your faith. Remind yourself of what you believe. The reason we have vows is to connect us to what is true despite how we feel. The reason we have doctrine and theology is to remind us of God's truth. In moments of difficulty, reflect on God's promises and past faithfulness (e.g., **write down times you remember God's provision, read stories of God's provision in Scripture or church history**).