

## Adam Smith: On Board the Disciples' Ship

Matthew chapter eight, we're going to be reading verses 23 through 27. And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves.

But he was asleep. And they went and woke him saying, save us, Lord, we are perishing. And he said to them, why are you afraid? Oh, you of little faith.

And he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea. There was a great calm. And the men marveled saying, what sort of man is this that even winds and sea obey him? Let's pray together.

Father, your word says that with a word you made all things that exist. And we read this word that the sea and the wind and the air that you created with a word, Lord, raged and you calmed it with a word. And so Lord, as we now open your word, Lord, we are mindful of your authority through your word.

We are mindful of the power of your word. And we ask God that you would speak now by your spirit, the word that you have spoken. And Lord, where there are storms in our hearts that need calming, where there are fears of the future, we need security.

Would we find it, God, in your presence, through your word, by your spirit. Would you do that in us now, we ask in Jesus name. Amen.

Amen. You may be seated. Well, in my early twenties, I applied to the CHP Academy.

Spoiler alert, I did not become a cop. Part of the application process is a self-disclosure of one's drug history. And I didn't realize that many people lie on that, like the dummy that I am.

I told them the truth and I was disqualified. That actually has nothing to do with what I'm about to say. In that process, what is highly encouraged is to schedule a ride-along with CHP officers to go in the car with them to experience what it's like.

And I was super excited to do that. I had heard stories, my grandfather was a CHP officer in Santa Barbara. And so I had heard stories and was really excited to be able to participate in that.

And then I got to the station in Buelton and I'm, you know, got it, you know, anticipating and they, and they break out all of the waivers. And in that moment, it hit me, I'm not going on a tour. This officer has a mission.

He has a job to do. And for the next several hours, I am going along for the ride. Where he goes, now I go.

And what he experiences, I'm, to a different degree, I'm going to experience what he encounters.

If something dangerous happens, I'm, I'm right there. And all of the, the romantic ideas I had about law enforcement became very real in that moment.

And I think that's kind of like what is happening in this passage here. The disciples, they get into the boat with Jesus and they have an idea about who Jesus is. They've heard him teach and they've seen him heal the sick and cast out demons.

They have ideas about who he is, but all of those ideas are about to be tested because Jesus has a mission. Okay. He came for a purpose.

Jesus has a job to do. And so what we need to remember is this, that discipleship is not about inviting Jesus into our mission. True discipleship is participating with Jesus on his mission.

And so I want us to notice what is happening in this text, where we've come from and what's going on. See the crowd, the large crowds who have been following Jesus and clamoring after him because of the miracles and experiencing his teaching and the Sermon on the Mount, that crowd has narrowed. Okay.

There are still people on the shore who have seen Jesus heal. There are still people on the shore who have heard him teach, who have been amazed and intrigued and have been inspired by him, but they're still on the shore. And these people now are different in the boat.

They're not simply watching Jesus. They're following Jesus. They're no longer observing from a distance.

They are with him. They are in the boat. And that means they're going wherever Jesus is going.

And so the first thing I want us to recognize in this text is that the faith of the disciples is legitimate faith. They have legitimate faith. If you remember our time together from last week, we looked at two would-be disciples.

One man hesitated to follow Jesus because it confronted the plans that he had for his own life. Another man hesitated to follow Jesus because following Jesus confronted prior allegiances he had to family and community and the status quo. But now Matthew says that when Jesus gets into the boat, his disciples followed him.

No longer would-be disciples, we are talking about true disciples. They followed Jesus into the boat. Now listen, that doesn't mean that they understood everything there is to know about Jesus.

Okay, they didn't understand yet the cross. They didn't yet understand the resurrection. They didn't understand what it meant to actively participate in the kingdom of God and all of its fullness.

Their theology was incomplete and their understanding was limited. Their faith was immature, but it was real. They knew enough to follow.

And that matters because there are many who admire Jesus from the shore. There are many who appreciate the teachings of Jesus and who are inspired by him. Maybe many who believe that Jesus can do powerful things in the world and in their lives, but they've never actually entrusted themselves to him.

They've never stepped into the boat. They've never said in a moment of desperation and prayer, Jesus, wherever you go, I want to be right there with you. But these disciples did.

It was legitimate faith that got them into the boat. Maybe that's where some of us are here this morning, recognizing that our faith is not perfect. Our faith may not even feel particularly strong right now.

Maybe we can look at our lives and recognize a spiritual inconsistency or distraction or fear or anxiety or insecurity. Maybe you're here today and this is like your last ditch effort, right? You're like, my faith is hanging on by a thread. And if God doesn't show up now, I don't know where I'll be next Sunday.

I don't know where I'll be tomorrow. I don't know where my family will be or my marriage will be. I don't know where my life will be.

I need Jesus to do something now. Listen, even if your faith is hanging on by a thread, if Jesus is the reason that you are here today, that is an important thing to recognize. And I don't simply mean being present in a church building.

I mean, it's not even a church building, guys. It's a basketball gym. Nothing special about showing up to a basketball gym.

But if you're here because you believe that Jesus is worth following, if you're here because you believe that his words matter, that he can speak into your life, that where he is leading is ultimately good, if you believe that somehow despite all of your confusion and weakness, that he is your hope, that is legitimate faith. And it's good maybe you barely made it here this morning. You're anxious and distracted.

Your heart feels numb. Your prayers feel dry. Maybe you don't even know how to define what you're experiencing in your soul right now.

But if you're here because somewhere underneath all of that, there is still something in you reaching for Jesus, that's important because faith gets in the boat. Faith gets in the boat, whatever may come. Faith gets in the boat, whatever may come.

Right now, you are in the best place possible. Not because this room is special or that Christians are always safe, but because the church is the body of Christ. And so together, right now, we are with Jesus by faith, with Jesus in the boat, which means we are also on his mission.

And that leads us to one of the hardest lessons every disciple of Jesus needs to learn. That being with Jesus is the best place to be, but it doesn't always feel like the safest place to be. Verse 24 says that a great storm arose on the sea, so the boat was swamped by the waves, but Jesus was asleep.

The disciples are in this boat with him, anticipating where he will lead them, what he's going to do, what life following him is going to be like. Now that we've left the crowd on the shores and it's just us with Christ in this boat, what is going to happen? And out of nowhere, this massive storm begins to rage. Matthew says literally there was a great quake, this great cataclysmic, out of nowhere, shocking storm that just roars upon them.

And this is significant because many of you have experienced the same thing. You've experienced a life of following Jesus, where you believe that Jesus has invited you into a particular opportunity or to a particular experience. He's invited you into a particular relationship or you believe a particular job, whatever that may be.

You've experienced that I'm following Jesus into this new season of my life and there's anticipation and there's hope and then there's storm. You know it. You've been there.

But recognize oftentimes when that happens, the gut check is, oh no, I'm outside of God's will. Oh, I thought God was leading me to this. But the conflict makes us question.

And what we need to recognize is this, that the disciples are not in the storm because they disobeyed Jesus. They're in the storm because they're following Jesus. They're in the storm because they followed him.

It comes not because they're outside of God's will, but precisely because they are in Christ's presence and on Christ's mission. We need to remember that. Because when hardship comes, it doesn't necessarily mean that God is distant.

The disciples are exactly where Jesus wants them to be. And you can be exactly where Jesus wants you to be. And life can be hard.

They're exactly where Jesus wants them to be. And yet that truth in this text doesn't keep them from experiencing the legitimate fear of the storm. The boat is filling with water.

The wind is howling and the waves are crashing and the disciples are convinced they're about to die. And so they run to Jesus and they wake him up and they say, Lord, save us. We're perishing.

What we read in, I think it's, what is it? Six words? It's three words in the Greek. It's literally, Lord, save dying. Some of us know that prayer.

It's not an eloquent prayer. It's an honest prayer. Lord, save dying.

And they're afraid. And it's where we realize that legitimate faith is not the same thing as mature faith. Because the same faith that got into the boat completely unravels in the storm.

What we see is that the faith of the disciples may have been legitimate, but it is little. It's little faith. And so as the storm is breaking out and boat is getting swamped with the waves, there's Jesus fast asleep.

And so they wake him up. Help us. We're perishing.

Look how Jesus responds. He wakes up. He rebukes them.

He says, why are you afraid, O you of little faith? Literally, he encourages, he calls them, he accuses them of being cowards. He says, why are you so cowardly? Now, at face value, right, we've got two options here. Either Jesus is rebuking them because they misjudged the storm, right? Maybe Jesus woke up and it's like, it's literally drizzling.

Like, you guys are ridiculous. Or Jesus is downplaying the danger of the storm. Maybe it really is, you know, category five hurricane.

And Jesus is like, what's wrong with you people? But as we mentioned already, or as we should mention rather, these disciples, they knew this. They knew they were fishermen. They knew boats.

They knew that sea. They knew storms. This wasn't new to them.

They knew exactly what was going on. And so they can't be over-exaggerating the terror of the storm. They've been there before.

And it wouldn't be right for Jesus to rebuke them for legitimate fear of a legitimate life-threatening danger. And so what's going on here? The storm is real and the danger is real. The problem is not that the disciples misunderstood the storm.

The problem was that they misunderstood the one in the boat. The storm was great, but Christ is greater. They saw the wind and the waves.

They saw legitimate fear and terror, legitimate loss of life, but they were in the presence of life itself. And they didn't yet know that. And I think this is often the truth about Christ that we forget when we're in our storms.

We see the danger. We see the threat. We see the very real tragedy, potentially even loss of life.

Some of you are in that storm. And we forget that if Christ is with us in the boat, if Christ is with us in the storm, though chaos may come, though even death may come, Christ has authority over the storms in our life and has promised to bring us into peace. Maybe your little faith today looks

like mine did this week.

You look at your family, and you look at suffering, and you look at difficulty, and you look at those that you love, and you can't help. And you know that prayer, Lord save dying. Lord save dying.

You don't even know how else to put words to it. And you think, Jesus, do you care? Is Jesus asleep? Does he even notice what's going on? How are we going to make it through this? And then like me, you hear this passage, and you imagine Jesus looking at your little faith with disgust. Coward.

What's wrong with you? See, if we don't know who is in the boat with us, if we don't know who that man is, if we don't know what Christ is capable of, then what we expect in that moment, my faith is small. I don't understand. It looks like you don't care.

What we expect is rejection. What we expect or what I expect is just like overboard, right? Like you're gone. Listen to me.

That's not what happens. Jesus does rebuke their little faith, but he doesn't abandon them. He doesn't kick them overboard.

He exposes their fear. He doesn't admire their little faith, but he helps little faith. He helps them.

And that's the key. Legitimate faith runs to Jesus, and Jesus helps even when that legitimate faith is very little. Verse 26 says, Then he rose, and he rebuked the winds in the sea, and there was a great calm.

Now, we can't move past it too quickly. Matthew said that there was a great storm, and now because of Jesus' words, there is a great calm. The great storm is replaced by a great peace.

The violence of the sea is silenced by the Word of Christ. He rises up. He rebukes the wind in the sea.

He speaks to creation as the one who has authority over it. The sea obeys. The wind obeys.

The storm submits itself to Christ because all things in heaven and on earth will bow before the authority of Jesus. Amen? Church, this is what our hearts need in fear. This is what my heart needed this week.

We don't need for our circumstances merely to be changed. Okay, we don't merely need our emotions to be soothed. We don't merely need our questions to be answered.

All of these things may be good, but what we need more than anything is to see Christ in the boat with us. To see Christ by our side. To see Christ before our face.

To see Him as He is. As the one with authority over our lives. Authority over the storms and over

the fear.

Because peace doesn't come from the absence of a storm. Peace comes from the presence of Christ in the storm. He rises up in your life.

He speaks to the circumstances in your life. And the storm obeys. And that means the question that we need to be asking today is not about the size or the greatness of our faith.

The greatest question we can ask today is not do I have faith or is my faith great? The question is where does my faith turn in times of trouble? Because you all have faith in something. And so when the storms come, where do you turn? Do you turn to control? Do you turn to substances? Do you turn to sex? Do you turn to finances? Do you turn to something other than Christ? Because whatever you turn to when the storm comes, that is your functional Savior. And while there are many things that promise salvation, only one can deliver it.

And so in your time of fear, in the midst of the storm, turn to Christ. Whether in great faith today or little faith today. Whether in fear or in confidence, turn to Christ and run to Jesus.

Because your salvation is not dependent on the size or the greatness of your faith. Your salvation is dependent upon the object of your faith. Your salvation is dependent upon faith in Christ.

And little faith in a great God is all that's needed. The disciples aren't saved because their faith is impressive. They are saved because Jesus is faithful.

And the same will be true for us. Because Jesus didn't merely calm this storm 2,000 years ago. The storm is only a signpost to a greater storm.

Jesus didn't merely pass through winds and waves. He passed through the storm of sin and Satan and death. He went into Jerusalem.

He went into Passion Week. And there the storm gathered again as the Pharisees conspired and as Rome condemned and as the crowds mocked and creation quaked and darkness covered the face of the land. And there Jesus entered the storm that none of us would ever have been able to survive.

He didn't just confront a dangerous sea. He embraced the wrath of God against sin on our behalf. He didn't just encounter waves.

He received the judgment that you and I deserve for our lack of faith, for our sin in our lives. And unlike the disciples, Jesus' faith never fails. Unlike our faith, Jesus' faith never fails.

When we are cowardly, He is courageous. When our faith is little, He is perfectly faithful. When we panic and pray, Lord, save dying.

He says, not my will, but your will be done. And because He passed through death and came out

the other side in resurrection, everyone who belongs to Jesus will be brought safely through the storms. This is the gospel that you are not saved by the strength of your grip on Christ, but by the strength of His grip on you.

You can trust that. You can have confidence in that. Even little faith in that is assurance and security and hope and a future.

You can trust Him to hold the weight of your life in His hands because of the nails that He received in His hands for you. The one who brought great calm to the waters is the one who makes peace between us and God by the blood of His cross. And now by faith, we are not just with Him.

He is not just with us, but we are united to Him, the scriptures say. We're not merely helped by Jesus from a distance. We're united to Christ by the Spirit of God dwelling in us.

We are with Him in His life by the Spirit of God. We are with Him in His sufferings because the Spirit of God has united us to Christ in all that He is. We're with Him on the cross, with Him in the grave, and with Him in the resurrection.

And here's the most beautiful truth that the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians chapter 2. Because of all of that, currently, right now, in this moment, you are seated with Him in heavenly places. Your future is secure because Christ has raised, He has ascended to the right hand of the throne of God, and we are united with Him. Our deepest reality, church, is not the storms that we'll face in life.

And we will face them because we are a family of disciples on mission with Jesus, and this world will wage war against that mission. But that is not the greatest reality. Our deepest reality is not the fear of the storm within us.

Our deepest reality is not the weakness of our faith. The truest thing about us is that we belong to Christ. And if you belong to Jesus, then you are with Him where He is, and He with you.

And so what do we do with that today? Where do we go with that today? Here's my encouragement to you. Get in the boat. Get in the boat.

Legitimate faith gets in the boat. And so if you are still on the shore watching what Jesus is doing in the world and in the lives of other people, and you've seen it and you've thought, Jesus can help them, but I'm different. He's not going to help me.

He can't help me in my situation. You're on the shore and you see what He's able to do. The call to you today is through faith to put your trust in the risen Savior and get in the boat.

Jesus is calling you to follow Him, to put your faith in Him, not because you understand everything about Him. The disciples didn't, but because He is trustworthy. Get in the boat, not

because you know where He will lead, but because wherever He leads, you know that He and He alone has the power to save you.

And some of you may be in the boat, but honestly, the boat's still tied to the dock. You're with Jesus in name. You're near Jesus's people.

You attend, you show up, you listen, and you believe, but you're resisting the mission that He's calling you on. You want the grace of salvation, but you don't want the fear of the mission and the threat of the storm. You're afraid of what that obedience will cost you.

I want to invite you to name it, to identify what that is. Don't hide it from Him, but bring it to Him. See, this week I was at a hard time.

I was asking God, I was like, okay, we see the legitimate faith, but we see the little faith. God, what were they supposed to do? What were the disciples supposed to do in this moment? And the only story that I can think of that maybe sheds some clarity on it is the Apostle Paul in the book of Acts in his own storm at sea. And all of the crew is despairing of life, but Paul knows something that they don't.

He knows Jesus, and he knows what Jesus has told him. Jesus told him, Paul, as you have testified concerning me in Jerusalem, you will also testify concerning me in Rome. And so he knew, come hell or high water, nothing was going to stop God's plan for Paul's life and for Paul's mission.

He knew that he was going to make it to the other side. And it wasn't easy. The ship was wrecked, and he's on the island of Maltic.

It's bit by a snake. Like, it was not an easy path, but he knew that God's plan cannot be thwarted. God's mission cannot be stopped.

What God desires for me, I know that he will be faithful and true to see me through. And then what did Paul ask the sailors who didn't understand that to do? He said, throw everything overboard. Everything that is going to weigh this ship down, everything that gets in the way of getting us to our destination, get rid of it.

And so listen, whatever storm you face right now or in the future, the fear, the real fear that we experience is because of all the other stuff we're trying to that we think will not be compatible with the mission that Jesus has us on. Maybe that's sin, certainly incompatible with the mission of Christ. Maybe it's doubt or shame or fear, or maybe it's trusting in wealth or trusting in a relationship or trusting in something else.

Listen, if you're here today and you're like, I want on the boat, but I'm afraid, this is the call to you today. Whatever you're afraid of losing, bring that to the feet of Jesus. Be willing to cast that

overboard and trust that the one who died for your sins and raised from the grave and has seated you with himself in the heavenly places will not abandon you in the storm.

He is with you. He is for you. And the best place imaginable is with him.

May not always feel the safest, but if you're following him, he doesn't just bring you into the storm. He will bring you through the storm. Let's pray together.

Father, there are many storms waging against us right now, whether it's personal storms in our own hearts and our own fears, maybe it's life's circumstances, the enemy himself that has turned his head against us and is bringing hell and high water. It is you that we trust. It is you that we will fear.

It is you whose word has more power than anything in all of heaven and earth. For it was by your word, these things were made. And so Jesus, would you speak to the storms in our hearts right now? Would you speak to the storms that rage against us right now? And whether that storm dies out immediately or not, Lord, I pray that the great calm would come to our hearts.

Where there is a great storm, it would be replaced by great peace. Lord, where we are in the boat and despairing, would we see you? Lord, where we are on the shores and unwilling. Lord, would you soften hearts? Would you reveal your love, your compassion, your wisdom in this place? And would you bring us where you are for your glory and the good of your people? In Jesus' name.

Amen.