



TIME OF GRACE®

Keep the Faith: GOD Can

Study Notes

Summary

Someone might know about your fears and care about you personally, but if they aren't able to help you, your fear remains. But God is always able to help. Jesus proved this divine power when he calmed the storm and told his friends they had no reason to be afraid, a promise he still speaks to us today.

- **Big Idea:** GOD _____, and GOD _____.
- **Matthew 8:23-27:** ²³ Then [Jesus] got into the boat and his disciples followed him. ²⁴ Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. ²⁵ The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" 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. ²⁷ The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"
- **Reminder:** GOD _____, and GOD _____.

Points to Ponder

1. Based on your knowledge of the Bible, list five of the most impressive things that God has done by his almighty power.
2. Compare your list with the top five problems you are facing today. How does that comparison affect your hope for the future?
3. If God chooses not to fix your problems immediately, what might be his purpose? In other words, why would a caring God continue to allow _____ in your life? After answering, say a prayer for greater trust in God's love and in his timing.

Homework for Next Week

Read Lamentations 3:18-24.

Time of Grace Ministry
Keep the Faith: GOD Can
Matthew 8:23-27
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Pastor Mike Novotny

If you were God, what kind of life would you give to you?

Now if you were God, that kind of life would be easy. With your infinite power and control, you could snap your fingers and make that happen but do you know the problem? Do you know the major historical problem with giving someone a life that good? People forget; they forget about God. I got a text the other day from a young woman whose life was going pretty well. I had reached out to her to check in and see how she was doing and she had the humility to admit that she had kind of forgotten about God. God had blessed her with not one job but two. She had more money than she needed; opportunities to make so much money to put a down payment on her very first house. But she confessed to me in all that busyness and in all that blessing she had forgotten about her faith; she had forgotten about God.

Has that ever happened to you? Ever notice that sometimes it's when you're in pain that you really pray? That sometimes it takes a tragedy or a hardship or a pandemic like the coronavirus to get people like us to slow down and open our Bibles, to go online or show up in a church, to seek God with all of our heart because he's all we got? You ever heard that story that Jesus told about this great, beautiful banquet that the king prepared and he opened the doors for free but people were too blessed. They were too busy with their fields, their jobs, their weddings, their lives; they forgot about God. So if you were God and you could do anything, if you could give yourself the best life imaginable, would you? Or would a good life turn out to be a bad thing?

So I suppose you could change it. You could not give blessings but take them away. Dysfunctional family, emotionally abusive mother, absentee father, learning disability, getting picked on in school, bullied every day until graduation. A job that every single day feels like a Monday. Online dating that is pure frustration. People who look good and they say good things but in the end they disappoint you, they betray you, and they use you. A chronic pain that starts early and doesn't let up. Friendships that barely last. You end up in a nursing home where no one visits and no one calls, where no one cares, and your funeral is so pathetic there aren't even enough friends to carry your casket. God could give you a life like that. He could strip away every blessing so that you wouldn't be distracted by the things of this life. He could take away everything temporary so that all you have left is him and you hold onto him so that you're ready for all eternity; he could do that. But do you know what happens when God actually does that? It's not that we forget; it's that we shake a fist. We get so frustrated with God who supposedly hears us and he supposedly can do anything but he refuses to give us just one break, just one blessing. It would be so simple for him and he doesn't and maybe you've been there?

Recently, I reached out to a woman from our church and she was humble enough to confess that she was there. She had been asking God, begging God, for 20 years for this one little thing that would have been so easy for him. As a parent, she would have absolutely given that to her child but her Father in heaven wasn't giving that to his child. And she wondered, "God, you can. But you don't, God. You won't, God. So do you care, God?" Maybe you can see the difficulty of being God. You bless people and they forget you. You don't bless people and they get mad at you. And I'm not telling you all this for some like theological speculation; I'm telling you this because you are going to have some kind of combination of blessing and curse, of pain and pleasure. So how will you handle it? I know I painted the extremes of that spectrum but today, this week and this year, you're going to be somewhere in the middle. God is going to give you good things but he doesn't want you to forget him. And he's going to allow pain and hardship but he doesn't want you to get angry at him. So how is it possible that God can keep you right in that sweet spot? That narrow road; that whether he brings the storm or calms it, you keep your faith.

Well today, that's the question that we're going to try to answer. Because as we open our Bibles and turn to the book of Matthew, one of Jesus' earliest followers is going to try to convince us of two vital truths that we so desperately need to know. If you're taking notes at home, I'd love for you to write this down. The truths are these: That God can - only God can. We're not independent; we can't forget about him. We need him because God can and secondly, that God cares. That no matter what God does, no matter how good or bad it gets, God must care passionately and infinitely and eternally about people like us. So that's our goal; to prove that God can and God cares and Jesus' friend, Matthew, is going to help us do it. So let's open up our Bibles to that incredible story from Matthew 8 where we learn those two vital truths.

Here's what it says: "Then Jesus got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake so that the waves swept over the boat but Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him saying, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!'" On that day on the Sea of Galilee, the disciples realized that they couldn't. There's something you should know about that sea. The Sea of Galilee is actually the lowest freshwater body of water on earth. It's 700 feet below sea level. But the hills of Galilee right next to it are about 2,000 feet above sea level. And so, you could be on the Sea of Galilee on a nice, calm, beautiful day but once the wind comes rushing over the cool hills and plunges down to the warm water, something can suddenly happen; something that happens in this text - a furious storm. It's interesting - 2,000 years ago, the book of Matthew was originally written in Greek and the Greek word that Matthew chooses for storm is the word "seismos," which sounds a lot like the word "seismic." It literally means a shaking or an earthquake; like seismic activity. And the word translated here for fierce, a fierce storm, is the word "megalos," which sounds like it is - mega. So what happened that day on the lake was a seismos megalos; a mega shaking. An 8.0 Richter scale of the sea so that even these professional fisherman realized they couldn't. The waves crashed over the boat and water started to fill it up like a plugged bathtub with the faucet on full blast. And the disciples realized that if something didn't change, if Jesus didn't make something happen, the unthinkable was about to occur.

The other day, I made the mistake of googling videos of what happens when a ship gets capsized. When like in this story, the waves start to bust over the edges of the boat and honestly, just watching those videos was terrifying. You know, it's that cell phone footage and even these big boats look so small once the waves and winds start to billow. And I realized it didn't matter who was on the ship, how fancy or expensive, how intelligent the people or strong the horsepower. Once the waves started to move, they simply couldn't. And then I made another mistake; I googled the word "drowning." And I studied what physically happens to a human being when they drown. I'll spare you the details just so you get on a boat again in your life but I will tell you this - it's just treacherous; it's disturbing to even think about. They interviewed people who had almost drowned, who had experienced almost to the point of death, what that physically felt like. And when I put all that research together, I realized why the disciples felt what they felt. This was no joke. They couldn't stop the unthinkable from happening and if Jesus didn't make it happen?

So, can I ask you - have you ever been in a similar situation? Listen to the rest of the story from Matthew 8:26: "Jesus replied, 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?' Then he got up and rebuked the wind and the waves and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, 'What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!'" Even if it felt like he was sleeping yesterday, last year or last decade, in this moment Jesus could wake up and prove that he can. And so you can pray with mountain-moving kind of faith. You can say, God, last year at school was so hard but you can. You can make today different. You could transfer a kid who will become my best friend. You can change the hearts of the girls that have been picking on me. You can make things so much better for my grandson. You're God. You can. And God, you can fix this marriage. I can't but you're God. You could change his heart. You could change mine. You could let me, for the first time since it happened, to let it go and just love. We wouldn't have to grin and bear it for the sake of the kids. God, you could restore us. You could bring back affection. We could hold hands again. We could make love again. God, you can. You're God. And God, you could make this pet sin part of my past and not my present. You could rid me of this craving for what's killing me. You could make my last drink my last drink. You could make me a patient parent. You could help me to have peace even if I don't have a productive day. God, you could help me rejoice even if people don't like me or approve of me; even if they criticize me, you can do that in my heart. You're God; you can. You're the God who can cure cancer. You're the God who can dumbfound doctors. You're the God who can end anxiety. You're God! You can! Jesus, you could speak a word, rebuke my challenge, and it would sit down and obey you because you are God. So I'm praying today with faith. I will keep the faith that believes that if you're God, you're the omnipotent, all powerful, calm any storm kind of God, then you can.

Friends, I hope you pray like that. I want to pray like that: Your will be done. But God, O God, you can. And no matter what God does next, he cares. If Jesus gets up and calms the storm in an instant, it's because he cares about you. And if the storm keeps raging and it feels like Jesus is asleep, it's because he cares about you. It reminds me of a story I read about a witch who lived in a cottage. Recently, I read this book by a pastor and author named Tim Keller and he talked about a witch who lived in a place like this. Deep in the woods, she opened up the door of her cottage to any unsuspecting traveler who journeyed past. But what the travelers didn't know was

that she was a witch and that the bed they were about to sleep in was cursed. If any traveler was asleep in that bed when the sun came up, they would instantly turn into stone and be added to the witch's collection. However, in that cottage there was also a merciful servant girl. She hated the witch and had pity on the unsuspecting travelers. So one day, a young man showed up at the cottage. The witch invited him to the table to eat and the servant girl went to prepare his bed. But as she did, she stuck handfuls of stones and sticks under the mattress and into the pillowcase. When the young man's belly was full, he was ready to crash in bed but crash? He couldn't. The stones pushed into his bones. The sharp sticks and pointy thorns jabbed him in the skin. He barely slept for a second. And long before the sun came up, he stared at the ceiling, packed up his things, and scowled at the servant girl as he left as if she didn't care.

But she knew the truth. The reason he suffered wasn't because she couldn't; it's because she cared. And God is just like that. Sometimes, we scowl at God as if he doesn't care about us but he knows. I know that you and I assume that we'd be fine if he just blessed us; if he said yes to every prayer we would handle it perfectly. Most of us assume that we would be like the lottery winners who didn't let the money get to our heads but God knows. He knows that if he said yes to that, you might forget. If your body didn't hurt, you might forget. If there were open doors in every direction, you might forget. Sometimes God doesn't do what he can simply because he cares.

That's what Matthew believed. You should know that even though Matthew saw this incredible miracle on the sea, his whole life wasn't like that. If you would go on to read the book of Acts, you would find out that there were more martyrs than miracles; more suffering than instant salvation. And yet, Matthew and the other apostles were convinced that God still cared. In fact, you might have heard that famous passage from Peter who once shook Jesus awake and said, "We're going to drown. Don't you care?" He went on to write in 1 Peter 5: "Cast all your anxiety on God because he cares." He cares for you. So how did Peter believe that? When he was suffering like you and I sometimes suffer, how did he hold onto that? Well, the answer was hidden in the story that we just read. It's actually something I never caught before in all my years of reading the Bible; that when Matthew wrote this account in Matthew 8, he was hinting, he was foreshadowing, another story. A story that guarantees to us, no matter what, that our God always cares. Did you catch it?

If not, let me help you. Does any of this sound familiar? A story about scared disciples and Jesus sleeping, a seismos megalos, Jesus rising, a miracle, and men who ended up amazed and worshipping Jesus? Well, that should sound familiar. On that famous Sunday morning, not in the Sea of Galilee but in the city of Jerusalem, the disciples were scared, afraid, because Jesus was sleeping; he was dead. But then a seismos megalos - that's literally the phrase that Matthew uses in chapter 28 - a great earthquake and a stone was rolled away. And Jesus got up, exact same verb as Matthew 8, he rose from the dead. He worked a miracle, he calmed the greatest storm of all, and he erased as he conquered the fear of death. And his friends were amazed. Who is this? Even the wind and waves obey him. Even death can't stop him. And when Jesus brought them peace, when he showed up on that Easter Sunday and calmed their terrified hearts and said peace I leave with you, they came to believe that God cared. And in the years to come,

they would suffer. God would give them a heavy cross but they didn't doubt that he was love and that he cared. He had to if he died and rose for them.

And friends, the same is true for you. I have no idea what kind of life God is about to give you. There will probably be plenty of "this" moments, little glimpses of how good he is, and there will probably be a lot of "that" moments; suffering and hardship, things you wish you could change. But no matter what combination God gives you this year, I want you to know that a crucified Savior is the proof that God cares.

That's why today I want to leave you with a picture; a beautiful picture based off of Hebrews chapter six. You see, in this picture the sea isn't calm, the storm is raging and you are like that little boat helpless against the waves. And yet, you don't sink and drown into the waters of suffering. Why not? Because you have an anchor for your soul. Because your very heart is connected to this Jesus who is light and life. Because you see his nail pierced hands and you know that he is alive, risen from the dead, and so you are guaranteed to know he cares. No matter what happens in this short little life, he made my eternity with God perfect so he has to care. Ooh, that is the Christian faith! We pray boldly to a heavenly Father because we know he can. And no matter what he says, at the cross we know that he cares. So brothers and sisters, don't give in to forgetfulness and say no to bitterness. Instead, no matter what comes your way, believe that God can and God cares.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, my life is so good right now. My body feels good, I'm about to go on a date with my bride who loves me. My children still have affection for me. They bring joy into my home. My church is in a healthy place. I have great friends. I'm going to run 12 miles tomorrow morning. You have been so good so I pray that I don't forget you. And for everyone who is praying with me whose life is so good - not perfect - but so good, I pray that we would not forget you. Instead, that we would remember every single moment; that all of these good things are from you. They're a little glimpse of your wonderful glory. They're appetizers for us to feast with you in your presence forever in heaven. So help us not to forget but instead to leverage these moments and worship you as a God beyond any other.

But I know, Father, not everyone's in that spot. I think of the dear people I prayed for yesterday; the marriages that are stuck, the people that are sad, the addicts who have relapsed, brothers and sisters who are falling apart with anxiety and with depression. I think of them, God, and I pray that you would keep their faith strong. That as we grieve and lament life in this broken world, we would remember that we have a God who entered into it so that life wouldn't be broken forever. So that a day would come when there's no more crying or mourning or death or pain because the Lamb of God was slain and he rose from the grave.

So Father, no matter where we're at today, help us to think about you. Help us not to forget but to keep the faith. We pray this in the name of Jesus, who brings peace to troubled hearts, Amen.