

# Messiah Awakens

Matthew 8:23-27  
*Halifax: 19 December 2004*

## Introduction

In our study of Matthew's gospel, we are right in the heart of Matthew's presentation of Christ's miracles.

- Already we have seen the gracious way He reaches out to the lowly—
  - Cleansing an outcast leper
  - Healing a gentile's servant
  - And curing an older woman of a fever.
    - None of these persons were allowed as near access to the Lord in temple worship, yet Jesus ministers to them...
    - And His compassion for such persons becomes all the more striking when Matthew reminds us in 8:17 of Isaiah 53...
      - that Jesus did this knowing that in order to heal, He must take these infirmities and bear these sickness upon Himself.
      - Every healing and every cleansing was done in the looming shadow of the cross where He would become unclean and afflicted for us.

Matthew seems to have grouped Jesus' miracles in three sections of three in chapters 8 and 9.

- Each of these sections is punctuated by general summaries and calls to follow Jesus.
- In this way, Matthew is presenting these miracles in a way that calls his readers to discipleship...
  - He is saying,
    - "Here is the Messiah—
    - See the wonders that He worked on earth—
    - Follow Him."
  - And as we saw in verse 18-22,
    - "Do not be hasty and do not be hesitant—
    - Follow Him with sober zeal."

Today we come to the second triad of miracles which begins in verse 23.

- In this second triad, Matthew seems to be especially concerned to set forth Jesus' authority to us.
- He is showing us the proof of His divinity as the One who has:

- authority to command the wind and the waves
  - authority to over Satan and his hosts
  - and authority to forgive sin!
- Each of these miracles in done in a way that highlights Jesus' personal authority.
    - When the prophets did miracles, they either prayed or spoke in the name of the Lord—
      - but these miracles of Jesus are done in a way that shows that He Himself is the Lord over nature, Satan and sin.
      - This triad of miracles clearly demonstrates that He is not just a man, but God with unlimited authority.

The first miracle in this second triad teaches us about Jesus' authority over wind and wave...

- but it does so in a very helpful way...
  - a way that is instructive for every follower of Jesus...
  - for it presents Jesus as waking from sleep to exercise His gracious redemptive authority.

I want you to consider three things this morning:

- 1) That Jesus sleeps
- 2) What you should do when you find Him sleeping
- 3) And what happens when He awakens

### **I. First then, consider that Jesus sleeps.**

A. Here is a great lesson for you who are His disciples...

1. See Jesus here launching out into the Lake of Galilee in a little boat with His disciples.
  - a. They have set out after a busy day with Jesus healing and teaching.
    - All is calm, all is well,
    - There is that warm sense of satisfaction you have at the end of marvellous day where much has been accomplished.
    - There is a sense of serenity and hope as they launch out with their Saviour- this excellent One that they have come to trust.
    - There is a sense that something very wonderful is unfolding before their eyes, even though they do not fully understand what He will do.

- There is a sense of gratitude probably mixed with a little pride that **they** are following Him when others are not.
  - There is an assurance and confidence that following Him is just what they ought to be doing.
  - Overall it is a feeling of peace.
- b. These men have seen such wonderful things of Jesus...
- 1) Wherever He is, the curse has no power...
    - Sickness flees away
    - Demons are cast out
    - Lepers are cleansed.
  - 2) Everywhere is compassion is demonstrated as the One who came to save and redeem.
    - It is clear that this one did not come to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.
    - The authority He reveals is gracious redemptive authority—authority that works miracles to remove human misery.

TRANS> They have learned many lessons since they have been with Him...

2. And even on this calm evening in the afterglow of the day, Jesus has yet another lesson for them...
  - a lesson that will help to prepare them for the service to which they will be called in this world.
  - a. And this lesson is not just for them, but also for all who will come after them and learn of this account...
    - It is for all of you who read these words today and who want to follow Jesus.
  - b. These men with Jesus are none other than the seed of the whole church that Jesus has come to establish...
    - Jesus is the chief cornerstone, and these men are the foundation stones on which the whole building will be built.
    - All their lessons and their experiences with Him are reproduced for us so that we can know what it is to live with Him through faith in their word.
    - And tonight there is a lesson they will never forget.
  - c. And that lesson comes to them in the form a terrible storm.
    - The calm is interrupted.

- The sky begins to darken, the wind begins to howl, and the waves begin to rise!
- The Sea of Galilee lies just over 600 feet below sea level, near the northern end of the Jordan River.
  - Mt. Hermon rises 9,200 feet to the north, and strong northerly winds often plummet down the upper Jordan valley with great force.
  - When they meet the warmer air over the Galilee basin, the intensity is increased.
  - Hitting the cliffs on the eastern shore, the winds swirl and twist, causing the waters beneath them to churn violently.
  - The fact that they come quickly with little warning makes the storms all the more dangerous and frightening.
- And this was apparently a worse storm than usual, for even these experienced fishermen are terrified by it...
  - It is too much for them to handle!

TRANS> But where is Jesus?

- Where is the One who makes the curse go away?

#### B. Jesus is sleeping!

1. Here is the church, launched out into the sea of the world with her Saviour—
  - And He is sound asleep!
- a. Is this not a picture and a lesson of what these men would have to face in the days to come when they went out into the world?
  - After His resurrection, they would launch out with Him as their captain into the world with a sense of great anticipation...
- 1) But the winds of false teaching would blow in every direction and grow stronger and stronger...
  - There would be Gnostics and Judiasers,
  - There would be deceivers and heretics that would toss the church around and try to shake it to pieces.
  - And where is Jesus? He is asleep...

TRANS> And not only the winds of false teaching...

- 2) But wave after wave of persecution would strike against their little vessel...

- First from the Jews, then from the political powers of Rome...
  - They would be arrested, threatened, imprisoned, beaten, exiled and killed...
  - And where is Jesus? He is asleep...
- b. But I say, this has not been the case for the apostles alone, but also for the whole church in the centuries that followed.
- 1) Have the winds of false doctrine not battered her sails and tried to blow her off course?
    - Did the Arians not rise up to deny that Jesus is God...
    - And then the Papists to lead the church into ignorance and superstition...
    - And now the Modernists into rationalism and Feminists into the obliteration of holiness?
  - 2) And have the waves of persecution not continued to rage, to beat against her and try to tear her to pieces?
    - First the Jews, then the heathen emperors, then the Muslims, then the Papists, and now the rise of totalitarian governments around the world?
2. Where is this gracious Saviour who makes the curse fly away when He comes?
- a. The Bible often speaks of Him sleeping...
    - 1) Psalm 44:22-23 declares our testimony:
      - Ps 44:22-23: Yet for Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord? Arise! Do not cast *us* off forever.
    - 2) Psalm 77 asks the questions:
      - Psalm 77:7-9: Will the Lord cast off forever? And will He be favourable no more? Has His mercy ceased forever? Has *His* promise failed forevermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?
    - 3) Isaiah 51:9 calls upon Him to awaken for our help!
      - Isa 51:9: Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD! Awake as in the ancient days, In the generations of old. *Are* You not *the arm* that cut Rahab apart, *And* wounded the serpent?
  - b. Look at the life of poor Abraham...
    - 1) The LORD called him and Abraham left his home and put out to sea (so to speak) to follow...

- And no sooner did he get to the land that God showed him and there was a famine...
  - And then he waited for the promise of a son through whom Messiah would come and a son never came.
  - The Lord was sleeping—
- 2) And then there was godly Joseph, the son of Jacob—
- seized by his brothers and sold to Egypt as a slave...
  - Falsely accused and cast into prison while yet a young man.
  - Where was this gracious redeemer who makes the curse fly away?
- 3) Where was He during the 400 years of Israel's oppression in Egypt?
- Where was He when Israel was taken into captivity to Babylon...
    - and when Daniel was shown that even after they returned, they would be subject first to Persia, then to Greece and then Rome?
- c. Where is He today?
- when parents cry out to Him for the health of their child and the child gets worse instead of better...
  - when a young woman cries out to God for her husband and he dies...
  - when we pray and yet see false teaching and false notions spreading across our land...
  - when more Christians were killed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than in all other centuries combined?
    - Psalm 44:23: Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord? Arise! Do not cast *us* off forever.

C. But isn't a sleeping Saviour a contradiction?

1. Does Psalm 121 not declare plainly:

- Ps 121:4: "Behold, He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep."
  - Of course it does!
- a. And not only that, but what becomes of Elijah's taunt of Baal:
- "Cry aloud, for he *is* a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, *or* perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened."
  - Does this taunt not fall back upon us if our Lord sleeps?
- b. What about His covenant promise—
- Does He not say, "I will never leave you or forsake you?"

- Does He not say, “
  - Psalm 91:9-11: Because you have made the LORD, *who is* my refuge, *Even* the Most High, your dwelling place, No evil shall befall you, Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways.

TRANS> Is there a contradiction here?

2. There is no contradiction here, but we must understand how to sort it all out.
  - a. The key is to understand that there is a sense in which He sleeps and a sense in which He does not sleep.
    - 1) He does not sleep in that He continually works out His plan in the world.
      - And that plan includes visiting sin with judgement and curses...
        - The clouds are His chariots and the winds do his will...
        - The flames and the lightnings His pleasure fulfil.
      - God has His way in the whirlwind...
        - He sits enthroned above the floods.
      - The presence of His curse in our world is not a testimony that He is sleeping...
        - It is rather a testimony that He is LORD and reigns in the earth.
        - When He sent all His judgements upon Egypt it was not to declare that He was absent,
          - It was to declare that He is the LORD who exercises judgement in the earth.
          - In this sense, storms do not testify to His sleep but to His mighty acts of power...
    - 2) But He may be said to sleep when He allows His people to suffer.
      - a) Jesus wants us to know Him as the One who came to banish the curse from His people—
        - He revealed Himself as the One who cured our diseases and healed our infirmities and raised our dead.
        - That is the way He is among His people and happy state into which He is going to bring us all.
      - b) But we know now that storms do come to His people and much suffering of all kinds...
        - There is a sense in which we could say, “If He were here, none of this would happen.”

- When Jesus walked on the earth, He never attended a funeral without raising the person who had died.
  - That was the way He showed His gracious disposition toward us.
  - He is the One who came to banish the curse.
- c) And because He wants us to know Him in this way,
- we are permitted to think of Him as, in a sense, sleeping when God's curse bears down upon us.
  - When those afflictions strike, He is not doing what He will ultimately do...
    - All things are not, as far as final redemption is concerned, brought under Him as they soon will be.
    - When they are, there will be no more dead Christians and no more sick Christians and no more persecuted Christians.
      - He wants us to always think of Him as the One who is going to totally banish the curse for us.
- b. But He also wants us to know that until the last day when everything is brought under His redemptive sway...
- He will sleep.
    - There will be times when He sleeps and lets the winds of false doctrine blow and the waves of persecution shake us about.
  - But never think that He is not there to guide you and comfort you at these times.
    - He is in the ship with us and it will not perish unless He perishes, even though He is asleep as far as ending the trouble...
- c. And let me add that even though those storms rage,
- Not one wave splashes on our foot and not one breeze moves a hair but by His perfect wisdom and gracious design for His people.
  - Though He is not yet reigning as the banisher of the curse (as He will reign for His people),
    - He is certainly reigning as the Lord who works all things after the counsel of His unsearchable will for our good!
    - He is working as the One who brings the storms to mould and shape His church into the beautiful bride that He wants her to be.
      - It is not the common rocks, but the gold that goes into the refiner's fire...



- It is not the weeds, but the wheat that gets crushed with the threshing sledge...
- It is not the wicked, but the righteous that die in order that they might live.
- When the refiners fire and the threshing sledge and the cross meet you,
  - remember that though He sleeps as far as His final redemptive purpose...
  - He graciously works according to His perfect wisdom.

## II. And now I ask you, what should you do when you find Him sleeping?

A. Well it is quite simple... You should try to wake Him up!

1. Learn from what His disciples did when Jesus slept in the storm...
  - a. Here was this One who kept showing that He had come to banish the curse for His people...
    - fast asleep in this terrible storm!
  - b. They knew that He could change things if He were awake!
    - Though many of them were experienced at the sea, they woke up this carpenter because they believed He could help them!
    - They had already seen His power manifested over and over...
  - c. And not only did they believe He **could** change things,
    - They also believed He **would** change things.
      - They had seen lepers and gentiles come to Him and He was always willing to help them.
      - Now they found themselves in need and they believed He would be willing to help them too.

TRANS> He had revealed Himself plainly and deliberately as the one who could and would save His people, and they had received His testimony.

2. But how can you wake Him up when the wind blows and the waves roar?
  - a. You are to wake Him up by fervent believing prayer.
    - It is right for you to come as some of those Psalms teach you and say:
      - “Lord, why are you sleeping?”

- When you look at the church and you see her afflicted and tossed about the winds of doctrine and the waves of persecution,
  - It is no time to be silent!
    - To be silent is to betray a heart of unbelief or a heart that does not care!
    - Those who believe pray when they see the curse...
      - They say, “Lord, if you were awake, you would stop this!”
      - “If you were here, you would answer us and deliver us.”
      - “Wake up, arise, and rebuke the wind and the waves and we will have peace...”
      - “Do what you have promised.”

b. Do you not see this example throughout scripture?

- 1) Do you not see David with his dying child crying out to God as long as their hope?
  - 2) Do you not see Moses pleading with the Lord to deliver His people when God was ready to curse them?
  - 3) Do you not see Daniel, troubled by the captivity praying three times a day for Israel’s deliverance,
    - and setting himself to fasting and prayer when he sees the visions that show Israel’s future trouble?
  - 4) Do you not see Paul praying for the throne in his flesh—that Christ would take it away?
  - 5) Do you not see him again praying for Israel according to the flesh, that they might be saved and offering himself as one willing to be cursed that they might live?
- These are all efforts to wake up our sleeping Saviour!
    - And all these prayers are offered up to Him as so much incense and they will be heard...
    - He will redeem His people and banish the curse from us...
      - He is pleased when we want Him to do this and know that He wants to do it.

B. But you must also take heed when you find Him sleeping—watch yourself lest you become fearful and unbelieving when He sleeps.

1. This is what happened to the disciples!

- and I think it almost always happens to us too.

- a. You can tell that they fell into fear and unbelief because Jesus corrects them for it...
  - He says, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?"
  
- b. It is a humorous scene in a way...
  - 1) Just picture it—these experienced fisherman have given up!
    - They have done all they could, but this storm is too much for them.
    - Probably, they know others who had perished on this Lake in smaller storms than this.
    - They are not naturally cowardly men, but there is legitimate reason for fear for anyone who understands this Lake as they did!
  
  - 2) And they wake Jesus up from a sound sleep—
    - a) They are, it would seem, worked up into a frenzy by this time...
      - Matthew tells us that they said:
        - "Lord, save us! We are perishing!"
      - It would seem from the other gospels that they were all speaking at once because the other two gospels have different words:
        - One said: "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"
        - Another said: "Master, Master, we are perishing!"
  
    - b) And the humour is partly in the contrast of Jesus...
      - How calm He is—how unfrazzled!
      - He remains seated, and calmly surveys the situation!
        - He is like my father was when as a little boy I looked up at a huge transmission tower and thought it was falling because the clouds were moving above it...
        - I grabbed my father to make a run for it, but he was calm.
  
    - c) But the humour really comes out when Jesus asks them the question:
      - "Why are you fearful?"
        - Here they are, standing around him and shouting with waves crashing over the deck and the wind howling and He looks up at them and says:
          - "Why are you fearful?"
        - And Matthew shows us that He asks this question before He got up to calm the storm...

- I can see the disciples, panting but sort of calmed a little... just staring at Him and not quite sure how to answer this question...
  - “Why are we afraid????”
    - “Did you happen to notice what is going on around us right now?”
    - Yet, already they were comforted because HE was so calm.

2. And this fear and unbelief is what you need to beware of!

a. It is not fitting for you to all frazzled and disconcerted and cowardly when your Saviour is calm and collected.

- If your refuge and your strength is not shaken, why should you be shaken?
- These disciples were being trained to be like Jesus,
  - but how unlike Him they are!
  - He is calm and they are fearful!
    - He was training them to one day stand before their persecutors with this same calmness...
      - to steer the church through heretical seas with deliberation and strength...
      - to be pillars in a world that hates God.

b. How useless you are when fear consumes you!

- Perhaps you fear persecution from our government as our leaders grows more and more antagonistic to the truth...
  - When you have this fear, what an example you are for others!
  - You teach your children and everyone to be afraid instead of to lean on the LORD.
- Or perhaps you are afraid of the responsibilities that God has given you:
  - How can I lead my family in family worship?
  - How can I handle my children?
  - How can I have boldness before my unbelieving family during the holidays to stand for Jesus Christ?
    - And then instead of doing these things, you waffle out because fear consumes you.

c. But worst of all, you slight your Saviour and your God by your unbelief.

- 1) You see, there is a right kind of fear that recognises true danger...

- But that fear slips into cowardly unbelief when you start to fear the storm instead of the God who sends storms.
- The storm does not have a will of its own...
  - As we saw last week in Psalm 29, God sits enthroned over the storm and it does His will.
  - If anyone dies in a storm it is because God willed it to be so.
  - Fearing a storm and not fearing the God who sends it is like fearing a sword and not the man who wields it.
    - It is right to fear God, but it is an offense to Him to fear the storm and ignore Him.
    - I hardly think a storm comes into our lives that we do not, at least in part, err in this way.

TRANS> But once that is settled—supposing you are fearing God who sends the storm rather than the storm...

- 2) A second defect in your faith is to doubt God’s promises concerning you.
  - a) He has said that the storm will not hurt you...
    - No, that is not even enough—
      - He has said that the storm will do you good!
      - He causes all things to work together for good to those that love Him and who are called according to His purpose.
        - If you understood that “good” is becoming more like Jesus, then you can understand this promise.
        - If you think “good” is being comfortable and easy in this world and having all your fleshly desires satisfied,
          - then I doubt that you will find good in any storm— unless it happens to knock out a cranky neighbour’s house or something.
  - b) But you dishonour God when you begin to doubt that He will be true to His promise...
    - when you start to think the storm was sent to ruin you!
      - When you forget that the refiners fire is sent to purify the gold...
      - When you forget that the wheat is threshed and ground to make flour...
      - When you forget that the cross is borne to produce life.

TRANS> And so do you see what you must do when you find the Saviour sleeping?

- Go ahead and wake Him up...
  - Tell Him that you know He has a gracious plan and that He will put an end to the curse for His people...
- But make it a prayer of faith,
  - not a prayer of fearfulness and unbelief as if He might not do what He has promised...
  - Or even worse, as if He might not be able to do what He has promised.
- Yes, it is right for you to pray when you see the wind and the waves...
  - It is wrong for you to not pray...
  - But you err greatly when you doubt Him.
    - The disciples were going to have to learn this lesson in an even bigger way when Jesus was crucified.
      - Yes, they were to pray that His rule would be established—that was right!
      - But they were not to think that God was doing anything else but establishing His rule, even when He was in the grave.
        - Like us, they were far from perfect.
        - They had to learn to trust Christ even when He was sleeping in the grave.
          - And I think it is very striking that after He arose and the disciples realised that the cross was actually the way that God was answering all Israel's prayers for redemption...
            - They came to realise that Jesus let his enemies take Him and crucify Him and put Him in the grave for the very purpose of redeeming us.
              - He, as it were, slept while the winds and waves dashed Him to pieces.
          - Once the disciples understood that...
            - Which they did not fully understand until God's Spirit came...
              - You never find them cowardly again!
              - You never find them thinking the church is going to perish when they are small and their enemies are big and powerful...
                - They just stand there and boldly testify of the Lord Jesus.

- They stand on deck in the middle of the storm and say to us,
  - “Why are you afraid, O you of little faith”
  - They stand there calmly beside Jesus and wonder why we are so cowardly.
  - You are called to do the same!

### **III. Be encouraged because this passage tells you what happens when Jesus awakens!**

#### **A. Be assured that He will wake up to exert His gracious redemptive authority for us!**

1. I mean that gracious authority that banishes the curse from his people
  - Do you see Him standing there on that ship and doing that—
  - Look at verse 26
    - “Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.”
2. That is what Jesus is going to do for everyone of you who believe in Him.
  - a. He will absolutely banish the curse from us forever!
    - There will be no more sorrow, no more sighing, no more suffering for His disciples.
    - There will be no more winds of false teaching or waves of persecution.
  - b. And you see that it is an absolute change that He makes—
    - Immediately, there was a great calm!
      - That sea became just as calm as He was when He sat there in the middle of the storm and spoke to His disciples!
      - Usually after a storm, the waves remain choppy for some time...
        - But with Jesus, the storm reached its highest pitch and as soon as He spoke, it was completely at rest!
        - What a striking display of His gracious redemptive curse banishing grace!
          - Nothing of the curse remains!

#### **B. Brothers and sisters, you who know Jesus Christ, this is your hope!**

1. Already it has begun!
  - Already Christ has risen as the firstfruits of the resurrection.
  - Already He has taken the curse on Himself for all of us and risen above it with all authority in heaven and earth.

- Already we see Him crowned with glory and honour at the right hand of God!
2. But what we don't yet see is all things brought into subjection under His feet.
    - But this is what is sure...
      - He is the firstfruits of the resurrection and we who belong to Him will come after.
      - We will rise because He has risen.
      - He has opened the way to life for all of you who have trusted in Him for salvation.
- C. So now it is for you to marvel at Him as the disciples did...
- vs. 27: So the men marvelled, saying, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"
1. Marvel: He is one of us—yet He is God...
    - Marvel: This is the Son of God in full human flesh sent from heaven to be our Redeemer.
    - Marvel: God has given all power and authority to this One who joins Himself to His believing people.
    - Marvel: He is able to command the winds and the waves and they obey...
      - And He will command them!
      - Marvel: He will come and put everything in its place under His feet...
        - Under His feet to never molest His people again!
  2. The Bible teaches us in Thessalonians that when He comes, it will be that we may marvel at Him.
    - Marvelling at Him is what these disciples learned to do who were with Him...
      - They marvelled again when He rose from the dead...
    - And we will all marvel at the last day:
      - 2 Thes 1:10: when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired [or marvelled at—same word] among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.
  3. This Jesus is to be worshipped by you.
    - He is the One who has all authority in heaven and earth to save His people from all that afflicts them
      - Look unto Him, all the ends of the earth, and be saved.