

# Lo, I Am With You Always



“And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.”  
(Mark 4:37)

## LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS

The setting for our lesson is a storm on the Sea of Galilee.

**“Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.” (Matt. 8:18)**

The press of the crowd to follow Jesus and witness his many miracles began to tax his strength, and he wished to go by boat with his disciples to the other side of the Sea of Galilee to find rest and refreshment. The Gospel of Mark also tells of this event:

**“The same day, when the even[ing] was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side.**

**“And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships.**

**“And there arose a *great* storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.”  
(Mark 4:35-37)**

The Sea of Galilee is known for tempestuous storms that usually originate in the hills of Lebanon and course down between the mountain passes unto the face of the lake. These storms exhibit such fury that the Sea of Galilee becomes very dangerous indeed. Such a storm arose on this occasion.



The Master was with the apostles in the boat. In fact, he was in the “hinder part” of the boat “asleep on a pillow” when the storm arose. The disciples awoke him, and said:

**“... Master, carest thou not that we perish?**

**“And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a *great* calm.**

**“And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?**

**“And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mark 4:38-41)**

Jesus was laying the basis for the apostles to have complete confidence and trust in him as their Master. He wished to inculcate *faith* in the apostles, and this whole scene, this whole providence of God, was designed to that end. With the Master in the boat *with them*, even though he was asleep, their faith should have been sufficient in connection with his claim to be the Messiah, the One sent from God, that regardless of whether or not he slept, the powers, the elements of earth, would not be permitted to sink the ship in spite of evidences to the contrary. Of course when he stood up and rebuked both the wind and the sea, his action was something unheard of, and the apostles then realized that he was indeed Master of earth and sea.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John tell of another occasion when Jesus and the apostles were traveling by boat over the Sea of Galilee. The multitudes who had been sent away hurried around to the other side of the sea, so that when the boat landed, they were there to witness further miracles and hear more of Jesus' sermons. He gave the people many lessons. As evening drew near, the crowd had not eaten, so Jesus miraculously provided for them before sending them back to their homes on the opposite side of the sea. After he blessed five loaves of bread and two fish, there was a miraculous multiplication so that the crowd of five thousand people could be sufficiently fed. Imagine feeding so many with just five loaves and two fish! And after the people had been given the food, twelve baskets full of bread remained—enough for the disciples themselves in abundance.

Following this miracle, the Master constrained the disciples to get back in the boat to return to the other side whence they had originally come. He had to constrain them because they did not want to be separated from him. They wanted to stay with him at all times, but as was frequently the case, the Master wished to get completely separated, to be apart from the cares of earth and even from the apostles, by going either into the desert or to the top of a mountain. He wanted to get away from distracting influences so that he might commune with his Father. On this occasion, he went up into a mountain to pray.



**“And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.**

**“And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.”**

**(Matt. 14:22,23)**

John 6:17 tells that when the apostles got into the boat to go to the other side, the boat was headed in the direction of Capernaum. Mark 6:45 more specifically states the destination was Bethsaida, which was close to Capernaum.

The disciples set out in the boat, and as the Matthew account resumes, we are told:

**“The ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.”**

**(Matt. 14:24)**

The description of the wind as “contrary” did not simply mean that the disciples were buffeted about by a storm. The thought is that they did not seem to make any progress. They were determined to go to the other side of the sea, to their destination, but the wind seemed to be in constant opposition to them. Being from the Galilee area, they were familiar with such storms, but this particular storm was *most unusual*. The Matthew account says that the ship was “in the midst of the sea.” John’s

Gospel adds the detail that the disciples rowed approximately 25 to 30 furlongs, that is, a little more than three miles (John 6:19). In their furious rowing against this storm, they had progressed a little over three miles in their diagonal course across the sea. In other words, after all this rowing, they had gotten only to the middle of the sea, which was the point of no return. If they turned around and tried to go back to the shore whence they had come, the distance would be just as great as it was to proceed to their destination.

There is still another detail to observe. Incidentally, in studying the Bible, we are rewarded if we compare Scripture with Scripture—and, in this case, the four Gospel accounts with each other because they all contain valuable clues.

**“And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.” (Matt. 14:25)**

The time of night in which they arrived in the midst of the lake was the “fourth watch.” The fourth watch was reckoned as follows: From 6 p.m. (sunset) to 9 p.m. was the first watch, from 9 p.m. to 12 midnight was the second watch, from midnight to 3 a.m. was the third watch, and from 3 a.m. until 6 a.m. (sunrise) was the fourth watch. In other words, the apostles arrived in the middle of the lake after 3 a.m. in the morning—and probably closer to sunrise.

The disciples would have originally set out in the boat no later than 6 p.m. because they would not want to row in the pitch dark, and it would not have taken much time to go to the other side if all conditions had been normal. But what happened? They had been rowing with *all their strength* against this storm for *over nine hours*. They had been rowing all this time, straining themselves desperately, yet they were only in the *middle* of the lake.

The Gospel of Matthew continues:

**“And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were *troubled*, saying, *It is a spirit*; and they cried out for fear.” (Matt. 14:26)**

We should keep in mind that these were hardy fishermen who were not given to fear and trepidation. However, this storm was *most unusual*. It seemed as if all the demons were let loose in connection with the fury of the storm. Then, when Jesus walked across the water—the disciples never having witnessed anything like this event before—they were sure they were having all sorts of apparitions and visions. In fact, the Word indicates they thought they had seen a phantom.

The next development to observe is that when Jesus acted as though he would pass by the disciples, they cried out to him. Jesus then “spake unto them, saying, Be of *good cheer*; it is *I*; be not afraid” (Matt. 14:27). There is a psychological factor here as well



as other important lessons. For instance, the fact Jesus acted as though he would pass right on by means that if we want divine grace and strength in our lives, we must call on the Lord for *his* mercy, *his* strength, and *his* grace. If we try to do things in our *own* strength and handle burdens we cannot bear, we will not get a blessing.

When the disciples cried out, the Master rescued them *immediately* or, as Matthew 14:27 says, “straightway”: “Straightway Jesus spake unto them.” Not only did this lesson help the disciples to develop more faith, but also it was designed to benefit future Christians. Accordingly, through the Gospel writings, this lesson of the apostles’ experience has been passed on to the Church throughout the age.

And there is another point: One cannot reason properly under conditions of panic. The first thing Jesus did, therefore, was to assuage the apostles’ fear. His manner of addressing them (“Be of good cheer; [for] it is I; [so] be not afraid”) began to console them. Nevertheless, they were still doubtful.

**“And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me [to] come unto thee on the water.**

**“And he [Jesus] said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.” (Matt. 14:28,29)**

Thus we see not only that Peter had some faith but also that he seemed to be stronger in faith than the others, at least on this occasion. Peter tested the power of this personage he was addressing—the One who had claimed to be the Messiah and had said, “Be of good cheer; it is I” —and in this test Peter received *proof*, for he began to walk on the water, showing the measure of faith that he had.

But the account next tells us what happened when Peter began to think about the power of the wind:

**“When he saw the [boisterous] wind, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, *Lord, save me.*” (Matt. 14:30)**

It is true that on many occasions in our Christian life and experience, we do great deeds by the power of God’s Spirit—miracles are performed in our lives in the strength of the Lord—but even the strongest followers of Jesus have periods in their life of little faith. They experience a season, as it were, of little faith, a period of crisis. But Matthew tells us that “immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him” (Matt. 14:31). Peter was in the throes of desperation and beginning to sink really fast when he cried, “Lord, save me.” Under the urgencies of the case, Jesus caught Peter quickly and said unto him, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” (Matt. 14:31).

Jesus reprimanded Peter in a gentle way, and also the others. Remember that Jesus had done likewise in the earlier incident on the Sea of Galilee when he was asleep in the stern of the boat. When the disciples awoke him, he said (paraphrased), “Don’t you have faith? What is the matter with you?” The rebuke was of this nature because he wanted to press upon them the lessons this experience was designed to teach. Under other circumstances, he might not have spoken this way.

Of course some might ask, Why don’t the other Gospel accounts mention this lesson about Peter? With all four Gospel writers, in recording incidents in the life of the Master and their association with him, some were impressed with a particular experience or detail in that experience and viewed the matter from a certain standpoint, while others were impressed along another line. In this case, the others, by nature, probably did not want to expose Peter as having this weakness. But we appreciate that the Holy Spirit brought the incident to Matthew’s attention to record because the lesson is very helpful. The incident can be a source of consolation when we go through periods of great trial. It helps us to realize the Lord’s mercy—and that even the strongest Christians have times when they need help, the Apostle Paul being an example.

The account continues:



**“And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.” (Matt. 14:32)**

Notice the line-upon-line, precept-upon-precept method of teaching. In this instance, when Jesus stepped into the boat, he did not rebuke the wind and the waves. The first time, when he was asleep in the boat and the disciples awakened him, he had to rebuke the wind and the waves to show that the reason the storm ceased suddenly was because of his *power*. When Jesus exercised that power, when the disciples heard him do the rebuking, they saw the immediate and drastic effect of a *great* calm, showing him as *Master* of the sea and the wind. In the second account, when the disciples stepped into the boat and a great storm arose as had previously occurred, Jesus did not again need to rebuke the wind and the waves because the disciples already knew why the storm suddenly ceased. The Master leads us the same way—little by little—and in connection with our growth and development, certain experiences do not have to be repeated when we have already learned the lesson.

When the wind ceased, “then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him”; that is, when Jesus stepped into the boat, the other disciples rushed over to him and prostrated themselves at his feet (Matt. 14:33). “They ... came and worshipped him, saying, Of a *truth* thou art the *Son of God*.” The disciples did not say this in their hearts in the first account, when Jesus was

asleep in the boat. Rather, they were sore amazed and wondered, “What manner of man is this, that he can still the wind and the waves?” (Mark 4:41 paraphrase). Now they were ready for the next step of development. Instead of remarking, “What manner of man is this?” they said, “Of a truth thou art the Son of God.” Thus we see a progression, and this is the manner in which the Lord leads his people, namely, from grace to grace, and from knowledge to knowledge.

The Apostle John was very observing, very perceptive, for his Gospel reveals certain details not noticed by the others. For example, when the disciples realized Jesus was not a phantom, when they saw how he rescued Peter, when the wind ceased and the disciples joyously received Jesus into the ship, John observed something else:

**“Then they willingly received him into the ship: and *immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.*” (John 6:21)**

Imagine witnessing this development! The disciples had just been over *three miles away*, in the *middle* of the Sea of Galilee, and they had been rowing with their utmost strength against the storm for over *nine hours* to get to that position. But when Jesus stepped into the boat, “*immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.*”

Jesus was laying the basis for some very important lessons. Here we see that with the Master and in *his* strength, all things are possible. What from a human standpoint would have been *impossible* was accomplished with *ease* when the Master took control. Immediately the ship with the disciples was on the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

Additional spiritual lessons can be gathered. For instance, in the first storm, Jesus was asleep in the boat. During the second storm, he was not in the boat but was on a mountain praying. Jesus was leading the apostles to a further development of faith. When he was *with them* asleep in the boat—when he *was actually there*—their faith should have been strong enough to have confidence in him. Since he rebuked the wind and the waves on that occasion, he did not have to repeat that particular lesson in exactly the same way. The disciples were now ready for the little stronger test of his not being in the boat but on a distant mountain away from them.

In the darkness of that moonlit night, the apostles were in the storm, and great fear was in their hearts. When the Master ultimately delivered them and calmed the storm, they gained another important lesson; namely, whether he was with them or far apart made little difference, for *nothing* can shorten the hand of divine mercy to save.



The Mark account tells us that when Jesus was absent and in the mountain, he could see the boat from the peak (Mark 6:48). This detail shows that Jesus knows what is going on even though we may feel he is absent from us. He has the ability to keep matters under control and to keep his followers under watchful solicitude. That is not the problem—the problem is with *us* and with *our lack* of faith.

As the disciples reflected on the experience of Jesus' walking out on the water to them, they would have been *amazed* at the *ease* with which he traversed the lake. He calmly and easily walked atop the sea, whereas they had been *rowing* and *rowing* and *struggling*. Moreover, he appeared to them at the peak of their crisis, and only *after* they had called upon him did he save them.

With the deliverance occurring in the fourth watch of the night, there is a symbolic meaning, a dispensational lesson. The fourth watch of the night was just before sunrise, and so at the very end of the age, when troublous conditions are upon the earth and fierce, fiery trials come on God's people, Jesus will be with them. Jesus will be there, and he will save them *as new creatures beyond the veil*. Peter's experience seems to suggest that even some of the strongest of the Lord's followers may have a momentary faltering of faith, but Jesus will deliver them. In fact, the Scriptures indicate that just as the storm was calmed

suddenly, so at the end of the age, when conditions are at their worst, the days will be cut short by “the elect,” by the Church in glory with the Master, so that the storm will not harm others unnecessarily (Matt. 24:22).

We are reminded of another Scripture:

**“Lo, I am with you alway[s], even unto the end of the world [or *age*].” (Matt. 28:20)**

The implication is that although Jesus would be far away in heaven when he ascended after his crucifixion, yet he would have the *same abilities and powers* and would be with his people all down the Gospel or Christian Age, “even unto the *end of the age*.” This latter phrase suggests, further, that at the very end of the age, God’s people will have an especially hard trial or experience, but Jesus will be there to solace them.

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