

## ***Discipleship***

### ***More Lessons in Discipleship***

Lesson #11 for March 15, 2008

Scriptures: Matthew 14:22-33; Mark 4:36-41; 6:51,52; Luke 8:25; 24:37; John 6:19.

1. Often people in our day are inclined to say that if we could see more direct action from God or if we could see God actually doing something, we would have more faith. Do miracles produce faith? Does seeing miracles take place produce better “disciples”? If you could see Someone walking on water, or if you could see Someone simply waving His hand to calm a storm, or if Someone invisibly entered a room and then appeared visibly, would it “improve” or increase your faith? Can only God do those things? Could the Devil do those things? When Jesus did those things, the disciples’ initial response was fear! Why do you think that was? Was their fear a result of the unexpected surprise? Because they had seen the use of enormous power? Because they had seen something which was completely unexplainable from their perspective?
2. Have you ever wished that you could have “walked” with Jesus when He was here on earth? Do you think your faith would have been better than that of the 12 disciples?
3. Read Mark 4:36-41. Jesus performed a number of miracles on or around the Sea of Galilee. Relatively early in His Galilean ministry, Jesus spent an entire day teaching, healing, and preaching on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. At the end of that day, He was utterly exhausted and hungry. In order to get away from the pressing crowds, Jesus suggested to His disciples that they should take a boat across the sea to the relatively uninhabited area of Decapolis. The day had been calm, and Jesus very quickly found a place in the boat to lie down and rest. He was soon fast asleep. Other boats were following along. Suddenly, as if out of nowhere, a strong blast of wind and a terrible storm descended upon the sea. Do you think that was a “natural” storm or was it brought on specifically by the Devil in hopes of destroying Jesus and His disciples? Very quickly the storm became so severe that the fishermen-disciples really believed that their boat was about to sink! In their desperation, they suddenly remembered that Jesus was the One who had told them to go on that journey. A flash of lightning revealed Him quietly sleeping in the boat! The storm had not disturbed Him! When the disciples awakened Him, He simply stood up, waved His arms, gave a command, and the storm was over! Jesus asked them why they were frightened! And why they still had no faith! And their response? They were terribly afraid and began to ask themselves, “Who is this man? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” (Mark 4: 41, *GNB*)
4. If we truly have faith, is there ever any reason to be afraid? If we are truly Christian, what should we be afraid of? What kind of fear prevents us from witnessing? Are we afraid that people will scorn us? Laugh at us? That we might even become unpopular? Are we afraid of death?
5. Read Mark 6:45-52. A few months later, a similar episode took place. Jesus and the disciples had just finished a missionary tour, scattering out and covering all of Galilee. Upon their return Jesus suggested that they go alone to a quiet place for a while and talk about their experiences. But the crowds saw them leave in the boat and watched them travel across the waters. When they landed near Bethsaida, the crowds were almost there already. So, after a very brief time with His disciples, Jesus began a long day of ministering to the needs of the people. At the end of that day, He fed 5000 men plus women and children—a total of probably

at least 20,000—from a small boy’s lunch which he had forgotten to eat! That raised the level of excitement to a “fevered pitch.” They thought that surely, this Man who could heal the sick, raise the dead, and feed thousands from essentially nothing was the coming Messiah. Judas in particular among the disciples was determined not to miss that opportunity to take Jesus by “force” and make Him king! All of the other disciples and all of the crowd were in full harmony. But Jesus recognized the dangers of taking such an approach. He had not come to this earth to establish a political kingdom. And so, He dismissed the disciples with a tone of authority that they could not ignore, sending them back across the lake in a boat. Then He dismissed the crowds while He Himself went up into a mountain to pray.

6. Around four o’clock the next morning, He walked on the water toward the disciples in their boat. Some of those disciples had spent many, many nights on that lake. But, that night it seemed no matter how hard they rowed, they could not make progress against the wind. Suddenly, they saw what looked like a “phantom” or a “ghost” approaching on the water! The Figure was walking across the top of the water as if He were on a “Sunday afternoon stroll”! It looked like He was about to walk right past them when they recognized that it was Jesus! Peter asked if he could join Jesus, and he was welcomed! Then Peter walked on the water until he looked back, taking his eyes off Jesus, and then he began to sink! Jesus—with Peter in tow—stepped into the boat and the storm died. The disciples were completely amazed.
7. According to Mark 6:50 (*GNB*), “Jesus spoke to them at once, ‘Courage!’ he said. ‘It is I. Don’t be afraid!’” To English readers the statement, “It is I” might simply mean that Jesus was identifying Himself. He was indeed! However, “It is I” is the Greek expression *ego eimi* which is a direct translation of Yahweh, the Old Testament personal name of God. As Jesus stepped into the boat, the sea calmed and Mark continued by writing, “Because they had not understood the real meaning of the feeding of the five thousand; their minds could not grasp it.” (Mark 6:52, *GNB*) The Greek literally says, “Their hearts were hardened.”
8. We are accustomed to thinking of Pharaoh’s heart being “hardened” and others having their hearts “hardened” in the Old Testament. We also are familiar with that expression being used for the scribes and the Pharisees in the New Testament. But here we are told that the disciples hearts “hardened”! What was Peter trying to say to us through Mark? Some translations write, “Their minds were closed.” (*God’s Word; NJB*) Jesus had tried to show them by one of His most spectacular miracles—the feeding of the 5000—that He was, indeed, God. But when He would not allow them to make Him a political king, they could only think of being discouraged, disappointed, and depressed. Their minds could not rise to the fact that God was among them! The “storm” inside their heads was just as bad as the storm on the sea around them!
9. It is important to note in this story that Jesus, while praying on the mountaintop looked out, saw the storm, saw His disciples in distress on the lake, and immediately forgot all of His own problems so He could go to them. Imagine having God Himself personally looking after them, yet they were disappointed and depressed because He would not allow them to make Him king! Do we have God Himself personally looking after us?
10. How often do we fail to learn from the mistakes of others? Do we have to make the mistakes ourselves in order to learn from them? Ellen White suggests that it is better to make a decision and move forward even if the decision is wrong than to be paralyzed by indecision. (See *4T* 344)
11. Read Mark 4:38. “Don’t you care if we drown?” (*NIV*) Or “Teacher, don’t you care that we are

about to die?" (*GNB*) Imagine the disciples being upset because Jesus was not frightened like they were! As always, Jesus was calm.

12. Read Matthew 16:1-12; Mark 8:11-13; Luke 11:29-32. The Pharisees and the scribes were always asking Jesus to prove by a sign or by a miracle that He was the Messiah. The Jews had mapped out in their own thinking what they expected the Messiah to do. The Messiah would appear, take charge, eliminate the Romans, and set them up as the rulers of the world. In order to accomplish that, He would have to perform certain miracles along the way. About A.D. 45, a man by the name of Thudas appeared claiming to be the Messiah. He told people that if they would follow him down to the Jordan River, he would divide the river as Joshua had done so that they could walk across on dry land. A number of people followed him to the Jordan; when he could not divide the river, he was taken by the Romans and "dealt with." That gives us an example of what the Jews were expecting from the Messiah.
13. The scribes and Pharisees and sometimes the Sadducees repeatedly asked Jesus to perform such miracles! Since He claimed to be the Messiah, where were the "Messiah miracles"? They were not talking about the "ordinary miracles" that Jesus did every day.
14. Jesus responded to that particular demand for a miracle by saying, "None will be given them except the miracle of Jonah. In the same way that the prophet Jonah was a sign for the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be a sign to the people of this day." (Luke 11:29,30, *GNB*)
15. By contrast, Matthew 12:40 refers to Jonah who was swallowed by the fish, cast up on shore three days later, and then went to Nineveh after a repeat call to preach. Many commentators have taken that to mean that just as Jonah was in effect buried, then "resurrected," and then called to go out and spread the gospel; so Jesus would truly die, be truly resurrected, and then commission His disciples to spread the gospel. Luke seems to point out that several Gentile audiences responded to the much less effective preaching by people in the Old Testament but the scribes and the Pharisees did not respond even to the presence of God on this earth. Do you think that Jonah mentioned the fish when he went to Nineveh? Is that what gave his story clout? Why do you suppose that the enormous, wicked city of Nineveh repented?
16. What were the time periods in the Bible when miracles were performed in abundance? What were the circumstances of those occasions? Many miracles took place at the time of the Exodus. Many miracles were done by Elijah and Elisha. A lot of miracles took place in the days of Jesus. Were those times of great faith or little faith? Do miracles produce more faith? Or is it that in times when people have been, in effect, rejecting God in a wholesale fashion, God has to "send" miracles to get their attention?
17. When Jesus warned His disciples about the "leaven" of the Pharisees, they immediately began thinking about bread. But Jesus was referring to the way in which the Pharisees thought. Why is it so difficult to change the way people think? The way people think is sometimes called a paradigm. Is there a problem with our paradigm today? Does it require more than membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church to be saved? What kind of changes is God asking for?
18. In this lesson we have noted that the disciples were frequently frightened. What is it that makes people afraid? The disciples were afraid that they were sinking in the storm. They were afraid of what appeared to be a "ghost" walking past their boat. They were afraid of what the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees were going to do to Jesus when He went to Jerusalem. They were afraid when Jesus suddenly appeared in the upper room without visibly coming through the door. Is there a common theme in those experiences? Were they just shocked and surprised?

Many years later the disciple John wrote in 1 John 4:18: "There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear." (GNB) Is that really true? If we have the love of God in our hearts, does that eliminate fear completely?

19. Read Mark 8:31; 9:30-32; 10:32-34. Notice that in Mark 9 & 10, the disciples were described as being afraid. They were even afraid to ask Jesus what He meant even though Mark 8 says He made it very clear to them. It has sometimes been said that the greatest fear is the fear of the unknown. Was that a problem?
20. Today, we would suggest that the whole point of Jesus's life was culminated or summarized in that final week of His life. But, to the disciples at the time, it seemed like a complete disaster. Even though Jesus had told them that He would be killed in Jerusalem, they did not "know" or understand what was going to happen.
21. What are we afraid of in our day? Many people are afraid to ride in airplanes. But the drive to and from the airport is actually the most dangerous part of the journey!
22. So, finally, we must ask ourselves, "Why is it that some people choose to believe while others choose to doubt?"
23. "I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I am right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that."—Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (New York: Oxford University press, 1997), page 130.

Why is it that some people in our world do not want there to be a God? Often, it is suggested that to be a Christian, you must believe in a lot of things which are unbelievable. Joseph Addison, an English essayist, wrote, "To be an atheist requires an infinitely greater measure of faith than to receive all the great truths which atheism would deny."

24. Do people reject the truth because they do not want to go through the trouble of changing the way they are thinking? What can we do to try to help them overcome that barrier?
25. Isaiah 40-55 makes it quite clear that there are three things which prove the existence of God: 1) His creation, 2) His ability to predict the future, and 3) His ability to perform miracles. Is it any wonder that the Devil is doing his very best to discredit all those points?
26. What have we learned from this lesson? Honestly now, what is it that we are afraid of in our day? Are we afraid of physical danger? How would we respond if the time of trouble began now? Is God still waiting because we are not yet ready?

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