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**LESSONS FROM BOATS**

We’re living in the City of Sails. Auckland is famous for its harbour and its yachts, and the biggest turnout of sails for the year will be on Monday, the Anniversary Day Regatta, when Auckland harbour will be full of boats. The largest one-day regatta in the world. A lot of people go boating at this time of year, especially with the miles of coastland New Zealand has.

Israel has a long sea border too, and the Lake of Galilee, so there are a number of boating stories in the Bible. Today I’d like to look at some boating incidents we can learn lessons from. After all, we’re all in the same boat!

The most famous Old Testament story is that of Jonah – a fascinating story, but we won’t look at that one today, as it would be a sermon in itself. Today we’ll focus on some New Testament stories.

**(1)** **Matthew 14:22-33**

Verse 22-23 22“Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to the other side, while He dismissed the crowd. 23After He had dismissed them, He went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray. Later that night, He was there alone,”

Seeking solitude was important to Jesus – He wanted to be on His own. Many times. E.g. Verse 13 (another boat incident too.) 13“When Jesus heard what had happened, He withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed Him on foot from the towns.”

Verse 24“and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.”

Jesus knew what was happening. This goes to show He sometimes sends His people somewhere stormy, and keeps Himself out of the picture! The Sea of Galilee, also called Lake of Gennesaret, Kinnereth or Sea of Tiberius, [*kinnor* = harp], was notorious for sudden storms, and is the same today, with waves sometimes reaching 20 feet high.

Verse 25“Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.” The watches were 6–9pm, 9–12pm, 12–3am and 3–6am. So Jesus had been a long time on His own.

Verse 26 “When the disciples saw Him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.” Must have looked eerie and mysterious!

Verse 27“But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

He immediately set out to comfort them. But they still didn’t fully believe Him!

Verse 28-29 “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” 29“Come,” He said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.”

Verse 30“But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

When he focused on the problems at hand, he took his eyes off Jesus Christ. His faith was strong enough to get him out of the boat and walking on the water, but not strong enough to stand up to the storm.

How strong is our faith? We don’t have to walk on water, but we do walk through tough situations. If we focus on the waves of the difficult circumstances around us, we may despair and sink. We need to keep our eyes on Jesus Christ’s power rather than our own inadequacies or the difficulties of the circumstances.

Verse 31-33 31“Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” He said, “why did you doubt?” 32And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33Then those who were in the boat worshipped Him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

If we lack faith and cry out in fear, He will help us. A mild rebuke to get the lesson home.

**(2)** **Luke 8:22-25**

Verse 22-23 22“One day Jesus said to His disciples, “Let us go over to the other side of the lake.” So they got into a boat and set out. 23As they sailed, He fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.”

Verse 24“The disciples went and woke Him, saying, “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!” He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm.”

The disciples were seasoned fishermen, very used to the Sea of Galilee, but even they were terrified. The lake is surrounded by mountains which funnel the cold wind down into the lake, the cause of big storms.

Verse 25 “Where is your faith?” He asked His disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him.”

Again a mild rebuke. If they had faith, they would’ve rested with Jesus even though He was asleep, knowing God was with them and their work wasn’t finished yet. We do go through trials, individually and as a Church. (Verse 13 warned them about this – we are tested!)

This is an example where Jesus wanted them to stay in the boat. In the other, He asked Peter to get out of the boat. Sometimes He wants us to wait on Him (rest in the boat) – other times He wants us to act (step out of the boat in faith.)

Sometimes Jesus wants us to step out of our comfort zone and do something we’ve never done before – maybe an opportunity to serve, a behaviour to change, something new the congregation needs to try... If He wants us to do it, we can step out of the boat, keep our eyes fixed on Him and walk towards Him.

Other times, He wants us to wait on Him, to stay in the boat in the storm, and trust Him to guide us safely. The key is to know where He is, whether He wants us to move or to wait. We have to determine that, and stay with Him.

**(3)** **Luke 5:1-11**

Verse 1-3 “One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around Him and listening to the word of God. 2He saw at the water’s edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. 3He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then He sat down and taught the people from the boat.”

An interesting place for a sermon!

Verse 4-5  4“When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.” 5Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”

We need to be willing to follow Jesus Christ’s instructions, no matter what we think of the circumstances.

Verse 6-7 6“When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. 7So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.”

God is interested not only in our salvation, but in helping us in our daily activities. Jesus was using this miracle as another demonstration of His greatness.

Peter saw this in Verse 8. “When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”

That is the reaction of someone who finally “gets” it – sees how great God is compared to our human frailty!

Verse 9-11  9“For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 10and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.” 11So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed Him.”

Fish are compared to human beings. There are lots of analogies between fishing and evangelism. The huge catch they got could be a foreshadowing of the great harvest of mankind in the future. This catch could be compared to the spiritual blessings God pours down upon us. And the waves and winds can be compared to troubles, trials and tests, as we have seen in the other 2 stories.

Now we come to some real adventure action! This is a really exciting sea story of violence, intrigue and shipwreck.

**(4)** **Acts 27:1-44**

Verse 1 “When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment.”

“We” indicates Luke was on the trip. And the detailed description of the trip proves this.

Verse 3 “The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs.”

Paul was more favoured than the other prisoners, because he was a Roman citizen appealing to Caesar. Also, Julius was responsible for guarding Paul, therefore was with him all the time, and found he could be respected and trusted.

Verse 20 “When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.”

The storm pictures troubles we go through in life and sometimes they seem too great to bear. Possibly the “we” in verse 20 refers even to Luke and Paul. But God sent an angel to encourage Paul. And He is with us in our troubles.

Verse 30-32 “In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. 31Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved.” 32So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it drift away.”

They schemed to save themselves, but Paul knew they couldn’t make it to shore in the morning without the crew. This time the Centurion followed Paul’s instructions. Paul was quite a leader, and a man of action. Josephus writes that in AD 63 he suffered shipwreck in the same area (the Sea of Adria), with 600 on board. Only 80 survived. God can make a success out of a shipwreck. He makes sure even the most disastrous situations work out for good in the end. God used this event to reach Malta with the gospel.

Acts 28:10 “They honoured us in many ways; and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.”

Summarising our boating stories today, we have looked at:

**(1)** Where Jesus allowed a storm to trouble His disciples and called for Peter to meet Him in the waves. The overall lesson is that when we fix our eyes on Jesus, the storms of our lives can be quieted and overcome.

**(2)** Again, a storm was allowed to trouble them, until they called on Him for help. In this case they didn’t have to go anywhere, but just rest and wait quietly on Him for help.

**(3)** When they followed His instructions and had faith in Him, they were abundantly blessed with a huge reward!

**(4)** God didn’t stop the storm and/or miraculously avert the shipwreck. He allowed it to happen, but guided Paul and assured him of his safety throughout, and brought it all to good in the end.

In spite of the troubles and raging waves of life that threaten to topple us as an individual Christian or a Congregation, God can and will pull us through in the end, even though there are storms on the way. Have faith in Him, follow His lead, keep our eyes on Jesus, and although we will be surrounded by waves at times, we will be delivered by His great miracle-working power in the end!

