

Sudden Storm: Survival Guide

Matthew 14:22-33

The Sea of Galilee is known for its sudden life-threatening storms. In the time of Christ, those who labored on Galilee were experienced businessmen; those fishermen knew everything they needed to know to make a living on this large, fresh-water lake. As Jesus had pointed out, many of the ordinary weather changes in the land were predictable (Matthew 16:1-4). Just as we say, “red sky at morning, sailor take warning; red sky at night, sailors delight,” the people of Israel knew how to read the weather patterns. But the weather on the Sea of Galilee is highly unpredictable due to the surrounding geography. To the north, the region is dominated by the 28 mile long ridge called Mt. Hermon. Rising to more than 9,000 feet, Mt. Hermon receives constant precipitation from the warm, moist air coming off of the Mediterranean. The water from rain and melted snow is the lifeblood for the region below. From the well-watered areas south of the Mt. Hermon ridge comes the water supply for the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee.

Lowest Lakes on Earthⁱ

Two of the lowest lakesⁱⁱ on the surface of the earth are the Dead Sea (1412 feet below sea level) and the Sea of Galilee (704 feet below sea level). Both of these are in The Great Riftⁱⁱⁱ that runs from Lebanon down into east Africa.

Sudden Storms on Galilee

The weather on the Sea of Galilee is unusual. Why? It is because it is surrounded by mountains and hills. Forty-three miles to the north is Mt. Hermon, a lofty, snowy ridge. From there, the land slopes downward to Galilee. Just eleven miles from Galilee, the Safed mountains are nearly 3000 feet above sea level. Near the shores of Galilee, Mt. Arbel rises to 594 feet. When the cooler air tumbles down from these lofty heights, the winds rush out violently upon the Sea of Galilee (which is only 200 feet deep at its deepest). (Just imagine if our shallow Lake Erie here in Ohio were surrounded by mountains; you would see the same storm effect.)

Seven Reminders in Your Survival Guide for Sudden Storms

Jesus was a remarkable Guide for His disciples; He is still a Guide for us today. What does He want you to remember when you suddenly find yourself in a serious storm – a financial storm, a family storm, a storm in our physical body? What does He want you to know and remember when you stand by the bed of a loved who is passing into eternity – and your thoughts swirl around you? Here are seven reminders from this passage:

First Reminder

1. Remember that Jesus sent you into the storm. 22

“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.”

Christ’s disciples have the confidence of being called and the security of being sent. Jesus sent the Twelve onto the lake and into the gathering storm. When you face your own storms, remember that Christ called you and that your Savior sent you.

The Bible is full of stories of how the saints endured the storms; by His grace, you can endure them as well. One of the most dramatic scenes in the Book of Genesis occurred when Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers. His hard-hearted brothers had sold him into slavery (Genesis 37). According to Genesis 39, Joseph faced the accusation of the classic “he said, she said” situation – but the Lord was with him and caused whatever he did to prosper. To broadcast his life message, Joseph even named his son, Ephraim, to communicate to future generations: **“For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction”** (Genesis 41:52).

When Joseph told his brothers who he was, he said, **“Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me here: for God did send me before you to preserve life”** (Genesis 45:5). You can imagine their astonishment as Joseph continued to speak. But to assure them that he harbored no ill will against them, Joseph emphasized God’s sovereign providence: **“And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt”** (Genesis 45:7-8). As you try to imagine Joseph’s thirteen years of enslavement, remember what he believed: Joseph believed that God had sent him to Egypt. Like his father, Jacob, Joseph believed the **“...God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went”** (Genesis 35:3). In your own trials and times of testing, remember that Jesus sent you into the storm. The Bible is full of stories of how the saints endured the storms; by His grace, you can endure as well.

Second Reminder

2. Remember that Jesus is praying for you in the storm. 23-24

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

That cool air, tumbling down from the mountain heights, had to pass by the One who was praying. Jesus could have caused those rushing winds to cease (just as He did in verse 32). But He didn’t. As the great Intercessor, He prayed for His disciples, even as the winds began to buffet the boat with the waves around them. What did Paul teach the congregation at Rome about the Christ who intercedes? **“...It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us”** (Romans 8:34). Is Christ still interceding for us today? Remember the words of Hebrews 7:25 – **“Wherefore He [Christ, our Great High Priest] is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them.”** Jesus is praying for you in your storm too.

Many of you in this congregation will remember the storm that our Christian school went through many years ago. Our story made it to the front pages of newspapers all over the world. Our school leaders were accused and lied about; many predicted that that would be the end of our Christian school. But little by little, faithful people and loyal parents began to realize just how powerless the wagging tongues really were. With the Apostle Paul, we would say, **“Being defamed, we entreat [appeal]: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the off scouring of all things unto this day”**

(1 Corinthians 4:13). But the Apostle Paul pressed on, and our Christian school flourished. Paul remembered what we all need to remember: Jesus, our Intercessor, is praying for us in the storm.

Third Reminder

3. Remember that Jesus will come to you in the storm. 25-26

“And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.”

Not only were they battling the angry waves, now the disciples saw something they had never seen before. Was it a lightning flash or the glow of the coming dawn on the horizon that illuminated the Lord upon the lake? We don't know; but we know that they saw Him, and they were terrified! This could be the way that the Savior will seem in your storm – strange and terrifying! But Jesus used the storm to reveal His glory in a way that was not routine. What can we learn about Jesus from this story? He may appear in a way that is not routine. In fact, He may appear in a manner that you do not recognize Him at first. How could they turn away from their fear and astonishment? After all, the One who would save them was drawing near. Yet they were terrified. But here is the third reminder for your survival guide in sudden storms: remember that Jesus will come to you in the storm.

Fourth Reminder

4. Remember that Jesus will speak to you in the storm. 27

“But straightway Jesus spoke unto them, saying, ‘Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.’”

What transformed the hearts of the men in that boat in the midst of a terrifying storm? **“Jesus spoke!”** He did not let them wriggle and wrestle with their terrors. **“Straightway”** or **“immediately,”** Jesus spoke. And He said, **“Be of good cheer”** (or **“take courage”**). What could give them courage in the swirling storm? The simple words of Jesus, **“It is I, be not afraid.”** Here is a great reminder for all of us. No matter whether it is a physical storm, a financial storm, or a family storm, Jesus will speak to you in the storm. Haven't you found that your Bible reading grows more precious in times of testing? Haven't you noticed how His words give you new strength to face a new day? Isaac Watts wrote, **“Jesus, the name that charms our fears that bids our sorrows cease.”** And Jesus is still speaking to us today.

Fifth Reminder

5. Remember that Jesus will allow you to go to Him in the storm. 28-30

“And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.”

Peter was not content to remain in the boat. Peter asked, **“Lord, if that's You, I want to be with You! May I go to You?”** And Jesus said, **“Come!”** Whatever storm you are facing, remember that Jesus said, **“Come unto me all you that labor and are heavily laden!”** (Matthew 11:28). He will allow you to go to Him in the storm. But it takes more than one small step to get there. As we learn from Peter, you

have to focus on the Lord. Keep your eyes on the Savior, not on the swirling storm. As Jesus later said, **“Abide in Me”** (John 15). But in the worst of the crisis, Peter’s victorious faith rose to the surface when he cried out, **“Lord, save me!”** When we are faced with conditions beyond our control, we can cry out in the same way. This was a powerful lesson for the disciples, and it is a powerful reminder for us today. We can go to Jesus in the storm.

Sixth Reminder

6. Remember that Jesus must have your complete trust in the storm. 31

“And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him, ‘O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?’”

Peter knew it was the Lord, and that the Lord had bidden him to go to Jesus. What was the problem? Peter was walking on water, in the midst of squall. But he started trusting himself instead of the Lord. That’s where we all make our mistake – self-sufficiency, leaning to our own understanding. But in order for you to survive your storm, Jesus must have your complete trust in the storm. Like Joseph, you must believe that God sent you and that God will deliver you.

Seventh Reminder

7. Remember that Jesus will teach you to worship Him in the storm. 32-33

“And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped Him, saying, ‘Of a truth thou art the Son of God.’”

Picture this. The moment that Jesus and Peter stepped into the boat, the winds stopped. Imagine the amazement of those disciples. The lesson was complete and they had been reintroduced to Jesus saying, **“Of a truth, You are the Son of God!”** Is it worth going through a severe storm to learn more about your Lord? Yes! And the disciples learned to worship Him yet the more. And then one day when they watched Him being taken away, crucified for the sins of sinful people, and rising again from the dead, they trusted Him and worshiped Him again. He conquered the whirlwind of death itself and arose victorious – and today we can walk through death itself with the confidence that He will save us.

Let’s take these 7 reminders as our survival guide for the sudden storms ahead.

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ⁱ See Taiwo Victor, “The 10 Lowest Elevation Lakes in the World,” accessed at <https://a-z-animals.com/blog/the-10-lowest-elevation-lakes-in-the-world/>

ⁱⁱ In 1996, scientists discovered a lake that was lower than the Dead Sea. It is Lake Vostok, in the interior of Antarctica, at 1600 feet below sea level. It cannot be seen with the naked eye. Lake Vostok was discovered using ice penetrating radar and artificial seismic waves. Since it is covered with ice, it is 2.5 miles below the surface.

ⁱⁱⁱ See “Great Rift Valley” accessed at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Rift_Valley