

The Perfect Storm

John 6:16-21

B.I: The storms of life are God's perfect means of revealing our utter dependency upon Christ so that we would grow to trust Him in all things.

I love reading the stories of Christian heroes of the past. Their lives of faith are so profoundly inspiring. Whenever I read about me like Adoniram Judson, William Carey, or David Brainerd I always come away with a greater desire to learn to be more faithful to the Lord. I always think that if I could cultivate the kind of faith they had The Lord would surely use me to do more for His glory than I could ever have imagined. But did you ever consider how those great men and women of church history became people of such profound trust in the Lord? I can tell you it was not primarily by reading biography. Rather it was largely through personal suffering. Sometimes the only thing that can break through our faithless, sense of self-sufficiency is the fury of a perfectly tailored storm designed by God to reduce us to utter dependency upon Christ.

That is exactly what the disciples needed by the time we reach the account of Jesus walking on the water. Little did they realize when they finished eating the scraps left over from that banquet in the wilderness and stood upon the shore of Galilee, that the delightful experience of the evening was actually the clam before the perfect storm.

I. The Calm Before the Storm (16-17)

1. It was evening and Jesus had just finished feeding the 5000. But rather than setting up camp for the night, he made His disciples get into a boat and cross over to the town of Capernaum where, I presume, they would have a better chance of finding lodgings.
2. It seems strange at first that Jesus would have sent His men off like that. It would have seemed to make better sense to keep the disciples around, so they could take advantage of the ministry opportunities which this great miracle afforded. But Jesus was determined. The disciples had to leave.
3. Evidently, Jesus had some trouble getting His men into the boat. In Mark's account it said "*Jesus made His disciples get into the boat*" This is a strong expression indicating urgency and pressure.
 - A. The Greek says Jesus "forced" or "compelled" his men to get into the boat. The twelve were reluctant to go.
 - B. Neither Matthew, Mark, nor Luke tells us why Jesus pressed them to go, but John gives us the key by telling us (6:15) that the crowd intended to make Jesus King by force. And from what we know about the disciples, they would have thrown their lot in with the crowd. So Jesus sent them away before any movement in that direction could begin.
4. Unlike the previous occasions when the disciples got into a boat, Jesus, rather than going with His men, chose to send them on their way alone and handle the crowds by Himself.

5. After bidding the people farewell, Jesus took the opportunity of being alone to go up the mountain to spend some hours in prayer. The mountain seemed to be His favorite place to commune with the Father.

A. Luke 6:12 tells us that before He choose the Twelve “He went off *to the mountain to pray*, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God.”

B. Luke 9:28-29 “ He took along Peter and John and James, and went *up on the mountain to pray*. And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming.”

6. We aren’t told what Jesus prayed about that night, but considering what He had planned for the men he loved so dearly that evening, you can be sure that He prayed for *them*.

A. Are you aware that every time you face a stormy trial the Son of God Himself lifts you before the Father in prayer?

B. Before Jesus’ death He said to Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but *I have prayed for you*, that your faith may not fail” (Luk. 22:31-32) And you know what? His faith didn’t fail. Peter persevered and became one of the great pillars of the church.

C. In John 17, Jesus cries out to the Father that He would keep us in His name, grant us fullness of joy, keep us safe from the evil one, sanctify us in the truth. Grant us unity with one another and Him, and grant us to see His glory.

D. 1 Tim. 2:5, we learn that “there is one God and one *mediator* between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

E. *Oh, what a comfort* to know that Jesus Himself prays for us. Heb. 7:25 says that Christ our High Priest “*always lives to make intercession for [us]*.”

1). So when you face a severe trial on the job, or in your marriage, or with the kids – remember, Christ is praying for you.

2). When you are tempted to give into the gravitational pull of that same old temptation – remember, Christ is praying for you.

3). When you fall into sin and you find yourself lying in a pool of your own guilt and shame – remember, your High Priest stands before the throne of God like a lamb who was slain interceding for you.

4). *Oh, What a glorious truth this is*; that Jesus Christ prays for you and me.

7. So I think Jesus was not just “checking in” with home via the long distance “heavenly hotline.” He wasn’t just fellowshiping with the Father. No, He was praying for His men; praying that they would learn from this storm the *depths of their dependency* and the *height of His supremacy*, and the *lengths to which He will go* to trust and rely on Him in every circumstance no matter what.

8. Well, by now the *Calm Before he Storm* was beginning to give way to *Chaos In the Storm*.

II. Chaos in the Storm (18)

1. As Jesus continues to pray, the boat was reaching the middle of the Sea of Galilee. **Verse 19** tells us they were about 3 to 3 1/2 miles out to sea.

2. Verse 48 of Mark's gospel is interesting. "*Seeing them straining at the oars...*" Somehow, Jesus was able to see them from the mountain and observed His men straining at the oars because a wind had come up and was blowing against them.

A. In the middle of their trial the men thought they were all alone and probably doomed. After all, the last time they faced such a storm at sea Jesus was in the boat to rescue them. Now Jesus was far away and presumably unable to help. Despite all the miracles He had done which transcended the barriers of distance, it never occurred to them that Jesus could help them where they were. They still did not think of Him as Almighty God.

B. They needed to learn that He is *El Roi – The God who sees*. 1 Peter 3:12, "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are attentive to their prayer." Not a single sparrow falls to the ground without the Father's care, and we (Jesus said) are worth more than many sparrows.

C. They needed to learn that the Lord is our Keeper who neither slumbers nor sleeps.

3. Mark says this scene was taking place during the fourth watch of the night.

A. The night was divided into four watches, or shifts. The fourth watch was from 3 to 6am. And usually concluded at dawn. It is likely, then, that the disciples had been straining at the oars for seven to eight hours. Jesus waited a long time before He came to them, just as He waited until Lazarus had been dead for several days before He came to Bethany. In both instances He could have come much sooner than He did, and in both cases he could have performed the miracle without actually being physically present – just as He had done for the Centurion's servant. But in His infinite wisdom, He allowed those He loved to reach the extremity of their need before He came.

B. The word "straining" here could be rendered "*tortured*." These guys were experiencing not only physical pain from the work, but mental distress as well. Once again they found themselves in a situation that was beyond them.

4. Now let's ask the text a question. How did these men get into this situation in the first place? Ironically, the disciples were in this miserable trouble because they obeyed Jesus. What a lesson for the church! Imagine what *disobedience* could have gotten those men that night: perhaps a full stomach, a warm bed in someone's home, an opportunity to dazzle their host with amazing stories of what it was like to live and minister with Jesus.

A. It was obedience that put them in such an uncomfortable situation. What does that tell us? It tells us that God has a plan for our suffering.

- B. If you submit your life to Christ in obedient commitment, you will expose your life to a variety of sorrows. Your caring, your commitment to Biblical living, will make you vulnerable to things which the uncommitted heart will never experience.
- C. Here is yet another mighty blow to ***Prosperity Theology***. “Name it, claim it!” thinking just cannot be reconciled with this experience.
- D. The joy of the Christian life is not found apart from the storms of suffering but often through the winds of suffering. As Kent Hughes wrote:

Never climb a mountain and you will never bruise your shins, but neither will you stand on the peak exulting in victory in the alpine air. Never play baseball and you will never strike out, but you will never hit a home-run either. Never obey Christ and you may miss some of life’s contrary winds, but you will never know the winds of the Holy Spirit in your sails bearing you along in service and power! (R. Kent Hughes, *Mark*; p. 158)

5. Jesus, having allowed His men to reach the end of their strength against the storm, now leaves the mountain to rescue them. But instead of procuring a boat, he simply employed His divine privilege over the creation and *walked* on the water out to where they were.

- A. Here is Jesus demonstrating His absolute supremacy over creation.
- B. Job 9:8-11, “He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea.”
- C. Yes, Jesus could have simply stood on the shore and whispered “Peace. Be still” and the wind and waves would have obeyed. But then His men would not have learned what He was trying to teach them.
- D. Jesus wanted them to know for certain that He is absolutely supreme over all their suffering, but to communicate that He had to do something shocking. He had to demonstrate that when necessary, He could defy the universal laws of nature as if they were nothing.

6. The contrast here is important. Twelve men confined to a boat were at the mercy of the wind and the waves. Jesus, on the other hand, perfectly free from the need of a boat had full command over the wind and the sea. It is a demonstration of God’s supremacy in bold relief against man’s dependency; man’s fragility and Christ’s omnipotence.

7. Turn with me to Mark 6. I find the end of verse 48 almost comical (Read Mark 6:48). Jesus intended to pass them by as he walked upon the water. He caught up with the boat and began walking past it almost as if He hadn’t noticed His 12 closest friends bobbing in the waves! I imagine him whistling a tune as he passed by (“This Is The Day). Why did He do that? Why didn’t He just walk right up and climb into the boat and take charge?

- A. It strikes me that he wanted them to notice how absolutely care-free and unconcerned he was about *where He was* and *upon what He was standing*.

B. He was no more afraid of what was under his feet than a child standing on a concrete sidewalk. He walked around in the middle of the lake outside that boat as if water was what everybody walked on!

8. Verse 49 (Mark 6) tells us how the disciples responded. When they looked up and saw Him out walking around on the waves they immediately concluded what any of us would have initially thought; it's a ghost! And to make matters worse, the ghost changed direction and began walking right toward them. No wonder Mark says they began to cry out. The Greek here literally says they "cried up" - or they screamed in terror.

9. When Jesus heard their screams He called out to them "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid!" (v. 50)

A. Oh, can you imagine the relief they must have felt the moment they recognized His voice?

B. John doesn't tell us, but Matthew says as soon as Peter heard the Lord's voice He cried out for Jesus to bid him walk out to Him. And sure enough Jesus called him out and Peter, too, walked on the water.

10. This account has always been a favorite story, especially among the children of the church. But Jesus orchestrated the whole thing to make a point. He wanted His men to stop thinking of Him in shallow terms. If they were going to be used to turn the world up-side-down after His death they would have to live with a deep and abiding sense of their own utter dependency upon His absolute supremacy over all things.

11. Sometimes God plans difficulties in our lives that stretch us to the very limits we can handle in order that we might realize How utterly dependent we are upon His grace and How supreme He is over all circumstances.

A. Thomas Watson, writing back in the 1600's said, "*The wise God sees it good sometimes to give us the [hot] sauce of affliction, to make us feed more hungrily upon the bread of life.*" (Thomas Watson. *The Beatitudes*; p. 135).

B. We need to learn that God sees our struggles and He is the Captain of the storm.

III. Captain of the Storm (v. 21):

1. So Jesus walked over to the boat with Peter in tow, climbed in with the other eleven. When He did the wind stopped immediately. How did the disciples respond to all of this? Mark says, "They were utterly astonished!" The Greek says they "lost their senses exceedingly."

2. And why were they so astonished? Mark says (v. 52), "Because they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their hearts were hardened."

A. Think about that for a moment. When Jesus multiplied the bread and the fish and with it fed 5,000 people He did it in order to show His disciples His supremacy over the very

fabric of creation by which he would meet their every need and fulfill His every promise. He wanted them to learn to Trust Him! But they didn't get it.

B. They thought it was a really neat miracle and they were probably really excited about the whole experience, but they didn't get the point. Their hearts were hardened. That is, they were insensitive to what Jesus was trying to teach them about Himself.

C. What was he trying to teach them? That He really is Creator God in flesh, *and that they can trust Him implicitly in every circumstance without fear.*

4. We are so much like the disciples; so slow to learn that God is Almighty God. But sometimes He does something so drastic that we fall to the ground (as it were) like Job and say, "I have heard of you with the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see you." Now I get it.

5. And it would appear that the perfect storm broke through the disciples' hardened hearts and achieved the desired result.

A. Matthew tells us an important fact that John leaves out. He writes: "And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshipped Him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God'" (Mat. 14:32-32)

B. They got it! They got it! And it changed them forever.

6. Are you facing some harsh circumstances right now? Have you considered the possibility that perhaps God has designed for you the perfect storm? Have you considered the possibility that He is attempting to strengthen make you strong in Faith. If you quit, you miss what He has for you. So, stay at the oars of obedience. Persevere against the wind, and wait for God to show Himself strong on your behalf. He will, because He always does!

7. Hudson Taylor once wrote: "Not infrequently our God brings His people to difficulties *on purpose* that they may come to know Him as they could not otherwise do. Then He reveals Himself as 'a very present help in trouble,' and makes the heart glad indeed at each fresh revelation of a Father's faithfulness. We who only see so small a part of the sweet issue of trial often feel that we would not for anything have missed them; how much more shall we bless and magnify His name when all the hidden things are brought to light!" (Hudson Taylor; p. 12).

8. So don't give up. Stay at the oars. And remember...

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