

The Storm

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Matthew / Matthew 8:23–27

Matthew 8:23–27 (2016 ESV) — 23 And when He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. **24** And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but He was asleep. **25** And they went and woke Him, saying, “Save us, Lord; we are perishing.” **26** And He said to them, “Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?” Then He rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. **27** And the men marveled, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey Him.”

INTRODUCTION

The context of this passage goes back to the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus speaks with divine authority, and continues in the earlier verses of Matthew 8, where He heals a leper, a paralyzed man, Peter’s mother-in-law, casts demons out of many people, and then healed those people of the effects of demonic possession, physical and mental. He then demonstrates His authority over people by establishing the requirements of discipleship; He is not at the mercy of those who want to follow Him THEIR way.

And now Jesus heads out onto the Sea of Galilee with His

disciples, traveling to the eastern shore of the lake. They were in a boat that was about 25 feet long, 7 feet wide, and 4-1/2 feet deep. We know this because in 1986 archeologists found a boat from the first century, buried in the sand of the Sea of Galilee.

TRANSITION: Let's jump into the story.

THE STORM

› And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. (Matthew 8:23–24)

Matthew says that this was a “great storm,” far more intense and powerful than the usual windstorms to come upon the lake. Remember, at least four of Jesus’ disciples – Peter, Andrew, James, and John – were professional fishermen. They knew the lake. They knew its weather. This storm was far worse than what they normally saw; perhaps it was greater than any storm they had ever seen.

Jesus’ disciples are bailing as best they can; someone is trying to steer with the tiller in the back; others are on the oars trying to get to shore as quickly as possible. They are fighting a losing battle.

And, Jesus is asleep at the stern of the boat.

Some have suggested that He was so fatigued and exhausted that He slept through the storm. We have to remember that Jesus was a human being, and He certainly got tired. But I don't think He was so tired that the violent pitching of the boat and the splashing of cold water on Him would not have waked Him.

Others have suggested that Jesus was able to sleep because of his strong, unshakable faith in his father in heaven. There is no question that Jesus trusted God the father implicitly and perfectly. But even this answer doesn't fully explain why Jesus was able to sleep in the midst of this terrifying circumstance.

What we must remember is that Jesus is fully God and fully man. He is everything that God is. He is everything that Man is, without sin. When the Son of God took on human flesh, He didn't cease to be the Son of God. In becoming man, Jesus set aside His divine privileges. But He didn't stop being God. Neither did He stop doing the things that fell to Him as God. Hebrews 1:3 says,

Hebrews 1:3 (2016 ESV)

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of

his power.

Jesus didn't start being the radiance of God and the exact imprint of the nature of God when He rose from the dead. He has eternally been the radiance of God and the exact imprint of the nature of God for all eternity. He didn't begin upholding the universe by the word of His power when He was resurrected. He has eternally upheld the universe by the word of His power. That includes the time of His earthly ministry. He emptied Himself of His divine privileges, not His divine responsibilities and work.

So, while the Son of Man was asleep in the stern of the boat, the Son of God was upholding the universe by the word of His power. That includes the very storm that His disciples were battling. Jesus was able to sleep because the storm was His creation, and obeyed Him every second. It was His servant.

TRANSITION: His disciples aren't asleep, though; they are in a panic.

THE PANIC

› And they went and woke him, saying, “Save us, Lord; we are perishing.” (Matthew 8:25)

There is no question, humanly speaking, that Jesus' disciples were in real trouble. The storm took them by surprise. It was far more violent than most of the storms they had seen, perhaps more violent than any storms they had seen. Even the professionals, those who knew the lake and knew the water, were terrified beyond belief.

So, eventually they went and woke up Jesus and cried out for help.

Can I point out what might seem to be a small thing, but isn't? Jesus slept through the storm without stirring. But He immediately woke when His disciples needed Him. I love this fact. What a picture of the amazing, tender, attentive love of Jesus for His people! He is like the mother of a newborn baby who wakes up whenever that baby cries. Jesus never demonstrated anything but gentle, protective love for His disciples, both during His earthly ministry and after His resurrection and ascension. He doesn't coddle His children; we have work to do, and that work is often hard, and sometimes dangerous. But He showers us with His love. Jesus was and is utterly unafraid of the circumstances of our lives, because He creates and controls and sustains everything that is, every single moment. During that storm He kept His disciples breathing, kept their hearts beating, kept their muscles working. He sustained them just as He sustained the storm.

But, of course, His men could not have known that. They had no idea who He was, or of His power and majesty. And so they went to him, and woke him, and prayed: “Save us, Lord; we are perishing.” They were not yet in the waves; they were not yet choking on water, trying to breathe; but their destruction was imminent. So they woke Jesus and called upon Him to do something, anything. What did they expect Him to do? I have no idea. We aren’t told. We do know that they didn’t expect Him to simply stop the storm in its tracks; Matthew 8:27 reveals their utter astonishment when He did exactly that. But they called upon him to do something. And perhaps their cry of “Save us!” was prompted by the Holy Spirit, who gave them words to say that they did not understand or believe.

TRANSITION: What did Jesus do? He rebuked their fear and weak faith.

THE REBUKE

› And he said to them, “Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?” (Matthew 8:26)

Why were they afraid? The storm, of course. The waves. The water. The boat was being swamped. It was reaching the point of no return. They were on the verge of being thrown into the water and drowning. The storm was real;

their fear was perfectly reasonable.

But Jesus rebukes them for being afraid. Now, He empathized with them – He recognized their emotional state. But He did not sympathize with them – He did not join them in their fear, or validate their fear, or say “I don’t blame you for being afraid; wow, this is really scary, isn’t it?”

For ordinary unbelievers, for those who deny God and turn their backs on Him, and rebel against Him, fear is a reasonable thing. But the disciples of Jesus have no business being fearful, or timid, or faint-hearted. So Jesus rebukes them.

Was His rebuke reasonable? They had no idea of knowing who He really was. So, is it fair that He rebuked them for their fear and weak face before they really understood who He was? The answer is, yes; it was right that He rebuked their fear and weak faith.

You see, mankind owes God all the recognition and worship due Him. The people of the world, whether Jews or Gentiles, are obligated to worship Him. He owes no one any proof of His identity or power. Can you imagine a child saying to a parent, “I’m not going to obey you unless you prove that you are my father or mother”? Adam and Eve recognized the sound of God walking in the Garden; they

knew their Creator. But with the fall came not only sin and rebellion, but ignorance and apathy; we don't know our God, and we don't care. It's only by His grace that we come to know Him.

TRANSITION: Jesus' rebuke of His disciples was right and reasonable. He had full control of the storm, from beginning to end. He created it; He sustained it; and He ended it. They didn't understand who He was, so He rebukes their ignorance, and then proves Himself.

THE MIRACLE

› Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. (Matthew 8:26)

God created all things by speaking them into existence. He rules His creation by speaking to it. Jesus spoke to the storm that He had created and sustained, and speaks to it like a person, like a child throwing a tantrum: "Peace! Be still!" The Creator didn't need to grab a big stick and hit His creation. He didn't twist a dial or turn a knob, or push a lever. He spoke to it. He spoke it into existence; He can speak correction to it.

Let me also point out that this storm did what no disciple of Jesus Christ has ever done – it obeyed instantly, without

argument or rebellion. He commanded, and the storm obeyed.

TRANSITION: Now, the disciples had asked him to save them. He did. How did they respond?

THE RESPONSE

Jesus' disciples asked for a miracle – “Save us, Lord!” Jesus gave them one – He calmed the storm with a word, like He was speaking to a child. The wind and waves immediately responded; they became calm and peaceful.

So how did the disciples respond? They marveled. They were filled with wonder. They were amazed. They were stunned.

It's almost like they didn't really expect Jesus to save them, or at least they didn't expect Him to save them like He did. The Son of David lay there, sound asleep at the stern of the boat. The Son of God had created that storm, was sustaining it, and would dismiss it when it suited Him.

But when He did dismiss it, it shattered His disciples' minds: “what kind of Man IS this, that even the WINDS and the SEA obey Him?”

This is EXACTLY what Jesus wanted to hear from them. It's why He put them in this position, created the storm, sustained it, brought it down upon the Sea of Galilee at exactly the right time, governed the movement of every breath of wind, of every molecule of water as it flooded into the boat and drenched them with spray. He loved these men, and He wanted them to understand His love and His power, so that they would have a foundation for their further growth and life in Him. With the exception of Judas Iscariot, these frightened men would one day boldly stand before enemies and preach Jesus Christ at the risk of their own lives. The knowledge of Jesus' identity as the Son of God, God incarnate in human flesh, began that very day. Beyond healings, beyond casting out demons, they began to learn the truth that Paul writes in Colossians 1:15-20:

Colossians 1:15–20 2016 ESV

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on

earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Let me stop here for a moment. It is a trustworthy saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. How does He save sinners? He made peace by the blood of His cross. If you are apart from Christ, if you don't have the kind of faith that sustains you through the storms, if you know that you still face the judgment of God, then I urge you to repent of your sins and turn to Jesus in faith. There is only one way to be reconciled to God, and that is through His Son. Believe the Gospel and all it says!

Looking back to the passage, His disciples had to learn and believe, without question, that Jesus Christ is no mere man, but God Himself.

TRANSITION: Let's bring this home.

BRINGING IT HOME

I hope that you remember two things this morning.

The first thing I hope you remember is that we learn by crises and the suffering they bring.

Jesus knows exactly what you face at this very moment.

Your circumstances are not random or accidental. He has decreed them. They are by His design. He will sustain the storms of your life until such a time as He is pleased to dismiss them. It was His purpose with His disciples to wait for them to call upon Him, and then to calm the storm before their eyes.

But remember that His rebuke of their fear and weak faith came BEFORE He calmed the storm, not after. He didn't challenge their fear and weak faith in the aftermath of a miracle, but in the midst of the storm. They had no idea how much longer the storm would rage. He called them to abandon their fear and trust Him even though they did not know when, or how, He would save them.

We call upon Him in the midst of our storms. It may well be that before He works He is going to draw our attention to our fear and weak faith: Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?

I'd like to tell you that once He rebukes our fear and weak faith, He will then immediately calm the storms of our lives, but I can't, because there is no way to predict His will. There may be a lifetime between our cry for help and the end of the storm.

The second thing I hope you remember is that there seems to be an inverted relationship between fear and

faith. The greater our fear, the weaker our faith. The stronger our faith, the weaker our fear.

What we need to remember in our storms is that Jesus isn't afraid of them. He knows every crisis faced by every single thing He created, whether animals or bacteria or rocks or stars or you. He is never afraid of those crises, those storms. He is never in a hurry to resolve them. Because the storms are fully in His control, because they serve Him and His purposes, He lets them do in us what He intends. James understood this:

James 1:2-4 2016 ESV

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

› Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet **trials** of various kinds, for you know that the **testing** of your faith [through those trials] produces **steadfastness**. And let **steadfastness** [which is produced by the testing which is brought about by trials] have its full effect [as the testing runs its full course], that you may be **perfect** and **complete, lacking in nothing.** (James 1:2-4)

He sends the storms to do us good. He is in control of

them, and they serve Him. They cannot overstep their bounds; they cannot escape His control. He keeps us and preserves us because of His love, by His power, for His glory, and our good. Look to Him today!