

INTRODUCTION

That's not a typo. We all face storms, but do you have the ability to faith the storms of life? Faith is more than a noun; it's also a verb.

I think one of the hardest jobs would be a weather forecaster. There was a Native American chief on a remote reservation in South Dakota whose tribe asked him if it was going to be a cold winter. He didn't want them to know he couldn't predict the weather, so he snuck away and called the National Weather Service. The forecaster said, "We're fairly certain that it's going to be a cold winter." So the chief went back and told the others to collect a lot of firewood for the cold winter. A few weeks later he called back and asked the forecaster again. This time the forecaster said, "We are more certain now that it's going to be a very cold winter." So the chief went back and told the tribe to collect even more firewood. A few weeks later the chief called the forecaster again and asked about an update on the forecast. The forecaster said, "We are now certain that this will be one of the coldest winters we've ever had." The chief said, "How can you be sure?" The forecaster said, "The Indians are collecting firewood like crazy!"

In our text today, Jesus and His disciples were planning to cross the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is actually a fresh water lake. It sits at 600 feet below sea level making it the lowest lake in the world. It's about fourteen miles long and about 7 miles wide. It is shaped like a harp. On any given night, it should have taken the disciples about three hours to sail or row across the lake. So Jesus and His disciples started out on a three-hour tour. The weather started getting rough. The tiny ship was tossed. If not for the courage of the fearless Lord the disciples would be lost.

Mark 4:35-41. "That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, 'Let us go over to the other side.' Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, don't you care if we drown?' He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?' They were terrified and asked each other, 'Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!'"

On the second floor hallway of the Crosswalk Conference Center we have The Life of Christ Art Gallery. This is a series of paintings that portray the life of Jesus from His birth to His ascension. One of my favorite paintings is "The Storm on the Sea of Galilee" by the Dutch Master, Rembrandt van Rijn. It was painted in 1632. It was displayed for many years in an art museum in Boston until it was stolen in 1990. Its whereabouts are still unknown. If you see it in someone's basement or vacation home, call the FBI because there is a \$5 million reward for information leading to its recovery.

But let's focus on the picture itself. A tiny boat is tossed and turned by the angry wind and waves. There are thirteen disciples, because Rembrandt actually painted himself into the picture. He's the little guy holding onto the rope staring out at the viewer. He's wearing his ubiquitous

beret. Just in front of him one of the disciples is leaning over the edge of the boat, apparently sea-sick. The message I think Rembrandt was trying to convey was there were some disciples who were fighting against the storm, their focus was the storm. But there were some of the disciples gathered around Jesus, their focus was the Savior. This painting begs the question, "When you face the storms of life, do you fearfully focus on the storm, or do you faithfully focus on the Savior?"

Let's learn five lessons on how you can faith the storms of life.

I. You can be close to Jesus and still encounter storms

Jesus knew all things and when He said let's go to the other side, He knew they would encounter a storm. Sometimes people who know and love the Lord think they should be exempt from stormy experiences of life. Some Christians make the mistake of thinking that just because they have the Lord in their life that they will be immune to trouble, tribulation, and problems. Even though Jesus was in the boat, the storm still struck. And even if Jesus is in your life, you will still encounter storms. There are physical storms, financial storms, emotional storms, and relational storms which can strike you suddenly with no warning. But just because you find yourself in a storm it doesn't mean that God doesn't love you or is punishing you. Jesus led the disciples into this storm to teach them to trust Him, so don't be surprised when you face storms.

Are you going through a storm right now? You shouldn't be surprised. The Bible says, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you...if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name." (1 Peter 4:12,16 NIV)

Can't you just picture that little boat in the storm? Wave after wave of water crashed over the bow. The wind was howling and the thunder was crashing. Sometimes trouble comes like waves, we may be between one wave; but there's another wave coming.

A guy on a ranch was being chased by a bull. He saw a hole in the ground so he jumped into it. The bull ran by, and the guy jumped out of the hole. The bull ran back at him and he jumped back into the hole; this was repeated for several cycles. Finally someone standing by the fence said, "Man why don't you just stay down in that hole?" The rancher said, "There's a rattlesnake in there!"

That's not too farfetched. The prophet Amos wrote in chapter 5 that sometimes a man runs from a lion only to meet a bear. When he finally gets home he leans on his wall and there's a snake. (Amos 5:19) Life can be tough, and Christians aren't immune. All of us encounter storms.

II. Jesus permits storms to test our faith

When the disciples awoke Jesus He immediately asked them two questions: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" In the previous chapter, Jesus taught a number of parables about faith and receiving His Word into our hearts. Like any good teacher, Jesus taught the lesson first, and now He's giving them the test. Will they trust Him during a storm?

God tests our faith in order to purify our faith. The Bible says, "These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold." (1 Peter 1:7 NLT)

Sometimes life is good. It's like a summertime when the living is easy. Fish are jumping and the cotton is high. Your daddy's rich and your momma's good looking. There's certainly no reason to cry when life is like that. And it's also not a time when your faith is tested. Instead, God tests our faith during the difficult times when the living is hard. Fish aren't jumping and the cotton is burned. And you have no idea what's going on with your daddy and momma. That's when God tests our faith. Here are three of the ways God tests our faith.

A. The pressure test

This faith test has one question: How will you handle stress when you are at your absolute limit? How do you react when you get to the POTD? (Point of Total Desperation) Like a pressure cooker building up heat and pressure, will you explode in anger, or will you keep the lid on and trust God until the heat finally dies down?

B. The people test

Sometimes God puts people in your life who will stretch your faith. They rub you the wrong way, and they seem to find the one exposed nerve you have and grind on it. They aren't hard for you to love—they're impossible for you to love. But you admit that Jesus loves them. So, how do you handle that test? Do you strike out at them, or do you patiently love them with the love of Jesus?

C. The persistence test

This test asks the question, "Will I maintain my commitments, or will I quit?" When you're on task for God, there will be a time when you want to give up. Sometimes all the external factors indicate that you should give up and throw in the towel. A weak person gives up too soon. But a wise person persists to the end of every commitment.

God rewards you when you pass the faith test.

Sometimes we hear a screeching sound over the television or radio and a voice says, "This is a test. This is only a test of the Emergency Broadcast System." Whenever you find yourself in the midst of a storm you should say, "This is a test. This is only a test."

III. Storms force us to cry out to Jesus

Several of the disciples were fishermen and I suspect they tried to do everything humanly possible to battle the storm. Maybe they trimmed the sails and pointed the bow into the wind. They started rowing and bailing water. But it soon became apparent their resources weren't enough so they called out to Jesus.

When they woke Jesus up, they asked him, "Don't you care if we drown?" They weren't afraid of the storm, they were afraid of drowning. Sometimes when we're in a storm our mind rushes to the worst case scenario. They were thinking, "Oh no, the ship is going to sink, and we're going to drown!"

Have you ever thought that or said to God when you're going through a storm? "God, don't you care that I'm going through a tough time?" You don't have to wonder. God does care. The Bible says that you can "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7)

A few years ago I wrote a book entitled, *No, That's Not in the Bible*. Everybody agrees that "God helps those who help themselves" isn't in the Bible. But the one chapter I've often gotten questions and comments about is the saying, "God won't lay on you more than you can bear." No, that's not in the Bible. The Bible says God won't tempt you beyond what you can resist. But when it comes to adversity and trouble, God will allow you to be burdened to the point where you realize that you can't fix the problem yourself. What if the disciples had been saying that? "Oh, let's don't wake up the Lord. We can handle this. After all, God won't put more on us than we can bear!" The next sound would have been, "Glub, glub glub."

It's when life is unbearable that we are forced to cry out to God. Paul understood this. In talking about some of his personal trials, he wrote, "We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God." (2 Corinthians 1:8-9)

You may be going through a desperate time right now. You're at the POTD. You may be wondering, "What should I do?" My advice is simple: Cry out to Jesus.

One of my favorite songs is called "Cry out to Jesus" by Third Day. It's the first song on my exercise playlist. The lyrics say: "To everyone who's lost someone they love; Long before it was their time. You feel like the days you had were not enough; when you said goodbye. And to all of the people with burdens and pain; Keeping you back from your life. You believe that there's nothing and there is no one who can make it right. There is hope for the helpless; Rest for the weary; And love for the broken heart; There is grace and forgiveness; Mercy and healing; He'll meet you wherever you are. Cry out to Jesus, Cry out to Jesus. For the marriage that's struggling just to hang on; They've lost all their faith in love; They've done all they can to make it right again; Still it's not enough. For the ones who can't break the addictions and chains; you try to give up but you come back again; Just remember that you're not alone in your shame and your suffering. There is hope for the helpless; Rest for the weary; And love for the broken heart; There is grace and forgiveness; Mercy and healing; He'll meet you wherever you are. Cry out to Jesus, Cry out to Jesus."

IV. Jesus will either calm your storm or calm you

I love the fact that Jesus was asleep during the storm. This teaches us several things. First, Jesus was a man who experienced fatigue just like us. But we also see He possessed such a strong sense of tranquility that He could sleep through the storm.

There were two storms present that night. There was the meteorological storm happening outside and there was the emotional storm raging on the inside of the hearts of the disciples. They were filled with fear. Fear can be more destructive than a hurricane.

Paul Harvey used to tell the story of a chicken farmer in Tennessee who suspected a fox was raiding his hen house at night. He was losing eggs and hens. So one night he put his loaded shotgun by his bed and stayed awake. He heard a ruckus from the henhouse so he slipped out into the night wearing nothing but his nightshirt. As he approached the dark hen house fear set in. He began to wonder, "What if that fox attacks me? What if it's not a fox, but a bobcat or a cougar?" As he stood at the doorway to the henhouse, these thoughts of fear swirled through his mind. It was at that precise moment that his old faithful hound dog, Blue, crept up behind him and cold-nosed him under his nightshirt. Kablam! Nine hens lost their lives that night. But Paul Harvey used to say that it wasn't the shotgun that killed them, it was fear.

Jesus said, "Why are you afraid?" Then He spoke to the wind and the waves and said, "Hush. Be still." Those were the kinds of words that a mother would speak to a crying child. "Hush, settle down." And the Bible says it was completely calm—there was a great calm. The word is mega. There was a mega calm. I've seen calm weather before, but I'm not sure that I've ever experienced mega calm.

In this case, Jesus took the storm away. But sometimes He doesn't remove the storm, instead He speaks to our troubled hearts and says, "Hush. Be still. Be quiet." And when we trust Him we experience a mega calm. We find a peace that passes understanding.

Paul had a storm he called a thorn in the flesh. God didn't remove it; instead He gave Him the grace and peace to live with it. Paul wrote, "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." (2 Corinthians 12:7-9 NIV)

Some of you have been asking God to take away your storm for a long time. He hasn't done that yet, but He is offering to give you inner tranquility in the midst of our storm.

V. If Jesus is in your boat, you know you'll make it through the storm

In the midst of the storm, the disciples had forgotten what Jesus said. He said, "Let us go over to the other side." Once the Creator of the Universe makes up His mind that He's going to the other side of the lake there was nothing in heaven or on earth that would have sunk that boat. The strongest hurricane in history couldn't sink it. All of Caesar's armies and navies couldn't sink it. The devil himself couldn't sink it. They were going to arrive on the other side because Jesus had spoken that word.

And Jesus has promised His followers that we'll make it through every storm as well. God never promised that we'd live a storm-proof life. He just promises to be with us in the midst of the

storm. I love the way Eugene Petersen paraphrases Isaiah 43. God says, "When you're in over your head, I'll be there with you. When you're in rough waters, you will not go down. When you're between a rock and a hard place, it won't be a dead end—Because I am God, your personal God...I paid a huge price for you...That's how much you mean to me! That's how much I love you! So don't be afraid: I'm with you." (Isaiah 43:2-7 MSG)

I don't know about you, but I'd rather be in a storm with Jesus than outside the storm without Him. The lesson of the storm is simple yet profound. Jesus never promises us a smooth ride, but He guarantees us a definite destination.

CONCLUSION

The greatest maritime disaster of history was the sinking of the Titanic on April 15, 1912. It wasn't a storm that sank her. It was an iceberg, but it was also the hubris of the shipbuilders. It was supposed to be an unsinkable ship, but that's all she ever did: Sink. One of the crewmembers commented to Mrs. Sylvia Caldwell when she boarded, "God himself could not sink this ship."

We all know the tragic story of how there weren't enough life boats and over 1,500 perished. But there's a part of the story you've probably never heard. The Titanic had been built in Belfast, Northern Ireland. After the news of the sinking, the people of Belfast took to the streets to weep and mourn. Grown men embraced other men and cried bitter tears.

The ship sank on a Monday. The following Sunday, at Derry Presbyterian Church, there was great sadness because 16 men who were members of that church had been working as engineers on the ship and all 16 had drowned in the icy waters of the North Atlantic.

The church was packed to overflowing that Sunday. Pastor Andrew Smith chose to preach on the text we've studied today, Mark 4:35-41. He made an amazing statement to the grieving congregation. He said: "There was only one vessel in all of history that was truly unsinkable—the little boat occupied by the sleeping Savior." Then he added, "And the only hearts that can weather the storms of life are hearts with Jesus inside."

Did you notice the last things the disciples asked? They said, "Who is this man? Even the wind and waves obey Him?" That's a pretty important question for you to answer as well. So who is this man? Let me tell you.

He is Jesus, God's Son, and you can trust Him. I wish I could more accurately describe Him to you, but He's indescribable. He's incomprehensible. He's invincible. He's irresistible! You can't outlive Him and you can't live without Him! The Pharisees couldn't stand Him, but they found they couldn't stop Him. Pilate couldn't fault Him. Herod couldn't kill Him. Death couldn't conquer Him and the grave couldn't hold Him. My friends, He's the Alpha and Omega; the first and the last; the beginning and the end. He's the God of the future and the God of the past. And there is no other name given among men whereby you must be saved. He is Jesus, and you can trust Him!

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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