

INTRODUCTION

I think one of the hardest jobs would be to forecast the weather. 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 sneaked 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 the winter. 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 got on a boat and found themselves in a terrible storm. If there had been weather forecasters back then, they might have delayed their journey. Instead, Jesus used this as an opportunity to perform a mighty miracle.

Storms can be scary, especially if you're in a boat. On October 26, 1991, the *Andrea Gail*, a 72-foot fishing boat was in the North Atlantic. The six man crew had been fishing for swordfish and the ship was attempting to return to its port in Gloucester, Massachusetts when a rare combination of weather systems came together in the North Atlantic to form what was later dubbed "the perfect storm" by the author Sebastian Junger. A weather satellite image taken on October 30 shows the remnants of Hurricane Grace swirling together with a polar air mass charging down from Canada. The result was an explosive storm with recorded winds in excess of 150 mph and the largest waves ever measured. The waves crested at the height of a ten-story building with a pressure of six tons per square foot of water.

The *Andrea Gail* really never stood a chance against that monster storm. The last recorded radio transmission from the captain was, "she's comin' on boys, and she's comin' on strong!" To the terrified crew it wasn't a perfect storm—it was a deadly storm. The story of the *Andrea Gail* and the Perfect Storm became the basis Junger's book and later a movie by that title. I can only imagine the feeling of dread they felt as they watched the howling wind and the huge waves building.

You may be struggling right now because difficult circumstances and unfavorable situations have come together in your life to create a perfect storm of trouble. But rather than talk about the perfect storm, I want to talk about the perfect storm calmer: His name is Jesus.

Matthew 8:23-28. "Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!' He replied, 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, 'What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!'"

Have you ever been outside when suddenly the air got still and quiet and it's almost as if the birds stop singing, and fly for cover? You can see the sky getting dark and smell rain. That experience is the basis for the old saying, "It's just the calm before the storm." There is actually some scientific truth to that saying, because meteorologists report that as a cumulonimbus cell starts building, strong updrafts inside the cell create a vacuum effect and the air becomes heavy and quiet just before the storm erupts. But that saying has come to mean more about the storms of life than about weather. On those rare occasions when life seems to be calm and peaceful, some people are so negative they say, "This is just the calm before the storm." They *expect* their situation to get worse, and guess what? It usually does! Do you find yourself living in fear that things are going to go from bad to worse? Instead of living that way, I hope this message can help change your attitude so you'll start expecting miracles. Then you can say, "This is just the storm before the calm!" In this miracle there are at least five life-changing lessons to learn.

1. STORMS RAGE EVEN WHEN JESUS IS IN YOUR BOAT

Verse 23 says, "He got into the boat and his disciples followed...without warning a furious storm came up on the lake." The Sea of Galilee is actually a beautiful freshwater lake six miles wide and fourteen miles long. At 600 feet below sea level, it's the lowest lake on the planet. It's surrounded by tall mountains, which can act like a funnel and a storm can roll in with amazing ferocity. Mark tells us this journey was taken at night. So, with no light, and no stars by which to steer, it had to have been a frightening experience.

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. The Bible says, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you." (1 Peter 4:12) The Bible isn't a feel-good book about people who lived perfect lives. It's a volume tracing the lives of hundreds of people who struggled with pain and suffering, yet maintained their faith in God. There are three kinds of people here today: those who have just gone through a storm, those who are in the middle of the storm, and those who are about to go through a storm! So, don't be surprised when storms suddenly roll into your life.

2. STORMS CREATE FEARS THAT CAUSE MORE DAMAGE THAN THE STORM

When the disciples cried out to Jesus He said, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" The disciples were fighting two storms that night. The first was the visible storm on the outside; the other was the invisible storm of fear that was raging in their minds. Fear can cause more damage than the thing you fear itself.

When Franklin Delano Roosevelt delivered his first of four inaugural addresses in 1933, the nation was in the grip of the Great Depression. Within the first minute of his speech he said, "This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let

me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.” There was truth in his statement. Some banks failed because customers feared they would fail, and as the rumor spread people rushed to the bank to withdraw their money, which caused the bank to close.

The late Paul Harvey loved to tell the story of the Arkansas farmer who kept losing hens to a nocturnal predator. He suspected it was a fox, so one night he left his loaded shotgun beside his bed. When he heard a commotion in the henhouse, he jumped out of bed and wearing only his nightshirt, grabbed his shotgun. As he approached the dark henhouse, fear began to take over. He began to worry, “What if this fox is rabid and it bites me before I can kill it? Or what if it’s not a fox, but a wildcat?” He was literally shaking with fear as he approached the henhouse. He paused to listen. At that very moment, his trusty hound dog, Blue, crept up silently behind his master and decided to show his affection. Old blue stuck his nose under the night shirt and “cold nosed” the farmer. “KABLAM!” Thirty hens lost their lives that night. Paul Harvey used to say, “It wasn’t the shotgun that killed them...it was fear.”

If you’re fighting against the storm of fear, God has a word for you. He says, “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10) What causes you to be afraid? Would it change if you could actually *see* God with you? If you could *feel* Him holding you up with His right hand? You won’t see Him or feel Him, but He tells you not to be afraid because He *is* there!

Fear is a bully. Most schools have a bully. When I was in the third grade, there was a bully at our school who kept taunting me and trying to get me to fight. I was afraid so I kept running away. One night I remember asking God to give me strength to face this bully. Not long after that, this bully chased after me, and I finally had enough courage to turn and say to her, “Leave me alone!” It worked, she didn’t bother me anymore!

3. STORMS NEVER MAKE JESUS PANIC

While the storm was raging, do you know what Jesus was doing? We read, “But Jesus was sleeping.” I love that picture! The waves were crashing and the winds were howling. The disciples were stressed out and Jesus was snoring away. What do we learn from that? First, Jesus’ humanity caused Him to be so drained from dealing with people that He could sleep in a storm. But second, His divinity assured Him that just because there was a storm there was no need to panic.

You can be certain that there are two words that have never been heard in heaven: “Uh oh!” God has never and will never say, “Hmm. I didn’t see that coming!” Corrie ten Boom used to say, “There is no panic in heaven—only plans.”

When I lived in Alabama I had a pilot friend, Jeff Tolbert, who operated an air charter service flying a Beechcraft King Air. Since I was a pilot, there were several occasions when Jeff called me and I’d fly in the right seat as his co-pilot. Early one Sunday morning we flew to

Montgomery, Alabama to pick up Mike Kolen, a former all-pro linebacker for the Miami Dolphins to speak at our church. Mike was part of the 1972 undefeated Dolphins squad and his nickname was "Captain Crunch." He loves the Lord and he did a great job sharing his faith with our congregation. As we boarded the King Air to return to Montgomery that afternoon, thunderstorms were building along our flight route. We climbed to altitude and it was a very bumpy ride. The King Air had weather radar so we could see where the heaviest cells were. Jeff flew a heading that took us between the heaviest cells, but it was still a rough flight. Mike Kolen was a brave football player, but he was a very nervous flyer. He kept saying, "Why don't we just land? I'm getting sick back here!"

As we approached Dannelly Field in Montgomery, Jeff and I could see on radar that there was a strong cell near the airport, but the weather at the airport itself was clear. The line of thunderstorms was still to the west. We were in dark clouds with rain and thunder around us, the visibility was almost zero. Mike kept yelling from the back, "I can't take much more of this!" I looked at the radar and could tell we were almost out of the storm, so I turned around and said, "Mike, hang on just a minute longer, and we'll be out of the storm, I promise!" I could tell he didn't believe me because he was sweating profusely and was a little green around the gills. In about sixty seconds we broke out of the storm, and the air was smooth and the visibility was unlimited. We were perfectly lined up with the runway and made a smooth landing. Mike stumbled off the airplane and kissed the ground. He was a little embarrassed and said, "I didn't think we were going to make it there for awhile. I should have believed you when you said we were almost out of the storm."

While Mike was sick with worry, neither Jeff nor I were concerned. We could see the radar and we trusted the ability of the King Air to fly through turbulence and rain. Do you ever feel like Mike when you're in a storm?

The key to having peace in the midst of the storm is found in trusting in Jesus. He said, "I have told you these things, so that IN ME, you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) Did you notice Jesus didn't say, "WITH ME you'll have peace." He said, "IN ME, you may have peace." The illustration that helps me claim peace is to think about being in Christ the same way that Noah was IN the ark. Noah, his family, and the animals were safe in the ark when the ark was in the storm. That's what it means for us to be in Christ. Jesus can sleep through a storm, and if you are in Christ you can rest in the midst of your storms as well.

4. STORMS FORCE US TO CRY OUT TO GOD FOR HELP

Several of the disciples were seasoned fishermen who had grown up on this lake. They probably did everything they could to survive the storm. They trimmed the sail, turned the boat into the wind, and started bailing. But finally they came to what I call the POTD: The Point of Total Desperation. They gave up and cried out, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown." I love the simplicity of that prayer. They didn't use a lot of flowery words like, "Dear Lord, as we come to you on this stormy evening, wouldst thou consider our plight?" No they just said, "Save us!"

We would much rather avoid storms, but God allows storms to come into our lives for the same reason—to teach us the He is powerful enough to calm the tornados of trouble in your life. Most of us know the verse that says, “Everyone that calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Romans 10:13) Most of us think that only applies to our initial salvation experience. But that’s a promise we should claim daily. Every time we find ourselves in a storm of suffering we should call on the Lord to deliver us.

The Bible says, “The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” (Psalm 34:17-18) Do you qualify? Is your heart broken, or your spirit crushed? Call upon the Lord and He will deliver you from your troubles.

5. STORMS STILL SURRENDER TO THE POWER OF JESUS

The Bible simply says, “He got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.” I can imagine Jesus moving to the side of the little boat. The fierce wind is whipping his hair and beard. The lightning is flashing and the thunder is crashing. Water from the pounding waves soaks through his robe. Mark records Jesus using a word a parent would use to reassure a troubled child. A good translation is, “Hush, now. Just calm down.” And the storm vanished instantly. The Bible says there was a “great calm, a mega-calm.” Then I imagine Jesus lay back down and resumed His nap.

Of course every storm eventually ends. Gradually. The point of this miracle was the *suddenness* of the calm. There was instantaneous tranquility. In a flash, the wind and the rain was gone and the water was as smooth as glass. The only sound was the ragged breath of the disciples and the pounding of their hearts. And there was another sound, the sound of twelve jaws dropping and hitting the deck. The Bible says they were amazed and said, “What kind of man is this?” That’s a question each person must answer for themselves. Who is Jesus? If you believe He is the Creator of the wind and the waves, then you can believe that all He has to do is to say, “Hush!” to your storm and you’ll find the same kind of calm the disciples experienced.

In almost forty years of ministry I’ve seen hundreds of Christians go through times of pain and stress, and yet many of them possess a sense of peace and calm that is beyond human understanding. That’s exactly the kind of peace the Bible promises, “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) Have you ever noticed the secret service agents who surround the President? Their job is to protect and guard him. In exactly the same way, God’s peace can surround your mind and guard your thought life. The secret service agents are trained to prevent any attempts that threaten the life of the President. God’s peace can protect your mind from damaging thoughts of fear that threaten to harm you.

CONCLUSION

In the midst of the storm the disciples forgot Jesus had said, “We’re going to the other side.” Once Jesus said that, no devil, nor demons, nor all the armies of Caesar could have sunk their boat. They could have renamed it “the unsinkable Molly Brown.”

And Jesus has promised His followers that we'll make it through every storm as well. Philippians 1:6 says, that "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion." If the disciples had just trusted His Word, they wouldn't have been afraid of drowning. Here's the lesson: When Jesus is in your boat you're going to make it to the other side!

When I was a pastor in my late twenties, Don and Pat Lyda were members of my church and good friends who were going through a storm. Their teenage daughter had gotten into some trouble, and I remember praying with Don and Pat. Don was an easy going person, but Pat was a high-strung lady who worried about anything and everything. I had just recently preached on this miracle, and Pat sent me a note that said, "The only thing I remember from your sermon was 'Jesus is in my boat so I know I'll get to the other side.' I'm hanging on to that promise." That storm passed, but within a year, Don discovered he had Hodgkin's disease. As he was dying, Pat wrote me a letter, and at the bottom, she wrote "Jesus is in my boat, so I know I'll get to the other side." After a long battle, Don died at the age of 43, and I could hardly talk during his funeral because we were so close.

When I accepted the call to pastor another church Pat wrote me again telling me she was still struggling with her pain and grief—and she was angry at me for leaving. After she signed her name, she wrote: but Jesus is in my boat and I know I'll get to the other side.

We've stayed in touch through the years, and Pat has remarried. Life is good and she loves being a grandmother. A few years ago I was in Alabama and Pat invited me to dinner. For dessert she brought in a cake decorated with a boat and a figure of Jesus standing in the boat. Can you guess what the words on the cake said? Jesus is still in my boat, and I know I'll get to the other side!

Folks, if you don't hear anything else I've said today, just remember that if Jesus is in your life, you WILL make it to the other side.

As I've gotten older, I don't worry about things as much as I did when I was younger because over and over again God has proven His faithfulness to me. The good thing about storms is that the more of them you survive, the more convinced you become that God will take care of you. When that's your attitude you can even thank God for the storms that come your way.

This overcoming attitude is expressed in an old song by Andraé Crouch. He sang: "I thank God for the mountains; And I thank Him for the valleys; I thank Him for the storms He's brought me through. For if I'd never had a problem; I wouldn't know that God could solve them; I wouldn't know what faith in God could do! Through it all; Through it all; I've learned to trust Jesus; I've learned to trust in God; Through it all; Through it all; I've learned to depend upon the Lord!"

So what is your perspective about life? Do you expect things are going to get worse and worse? If you do, then your motto is, "This is just the calm before the storm." That's a life driven by fear. But there is another way to live. You can live a life of faith that whatever happens, God is going to carry you through. When you're being tossed around in a storm you can smile and say, "This is just the storm before the calm!"

OUTLINE

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"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." *Isaiah 41:10*

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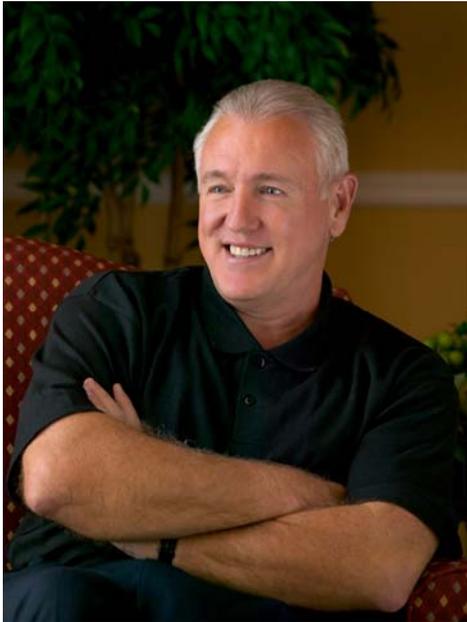
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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes