

*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. And they went and woke him, saying, “Save us, Lord; we are perishing.” 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. And the men marveled, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?”* Matthew 8:23-27

The story is told of a 200-year-old church with a bell-tower that was being readied for an anniversary celebration when calamity struck: the bell ringer of the church was called out of town. The church immediately advertised and found another. When the replacement arrived, the Pastor took him to the steps leading to the bell tower, some 150 feet above the ground. Round and round they went, huffing and puffing all the way up. Just as they reached the landing, the person applying for the job of “bell ringer” tripped and fell face-first into the biggest bell in the tower. Dazed by the blow, the bell ringer stumbled backward onto the landing, which caused the railing to break loose and he fell 150 feet down to the ground. Miraculously, the bell ringer seemed to be unhurt—only stunned—but the Pastor thought it best to call an ambulance. “Do you know this man’s name?” asked the paramedic when he arrived. “No,” the Pastor replied, “I’m sorry. He never told me his name. But his face sure rings a bell.”

Whether that story is true or not – the truth is that sometimes in life, we can feel like that bell ringer. In the midst of the making our way through both the normal routines and the new opportunities we face in life, we find ourselves at times falling face first into the loud bell of struggling with a painful problem. And sometimes, in the midst of the struggle and pain of the face-plants we do encounter in life, we wonder what Jesus really meant in John 10:10 when he told us that he came so that we “*may have life and have it abundantly.*” But the truth is, that the very things in life that cause us pain and struggle and grief and stress – the storms that we are pass through that hit us between the eyes – are most likely the means of grace of God that will use to shape our souls, which will turn out to be the doorway to a new season, a new hope, a new heart, a new life in our walk with God here on earth. We must never forget that Jesus promised he would always be with us, and that has God a plan and a purpose for our lives – and God’s plans and purposes will always include storms that will hit us right between the eyes. This is what Jesus’s closest disciples found out in a boat on the Sea of Galilee that we see in our text for today. This event in the life of Jesus we are looking at today begins the second set of three miracle stories that occur after Jesus preached and taught his Sermon on the Mount, miracles that gave clear evidence of Jesus as Sovereign King, who reigns and rules over everything in all the universe. The first set of miracles revealed Jesus Christ as the Sovereign King who has authority over sin, disease, and demons by performing *miracles of healing* on those who were struggling with the pain and suffering of sickness and disease. And Matthew now shifts to writing about three *miracles of power*; first over nature, then over evil spirits and lastly over sin and its consequences – which reveal Jesus Christ as Sovereign King over the natural world, the supernatural world and the moral world – by calming storms, casting out demons and forgiving sins – reflecting his authority over nature and spirits and the human conscience. Today we will see Jesus’ miracle of power over the natural world, reflecting his authority over nature. The immediate context of this event in Matthew is that Jesus has just rebuked an impulsive scribe and a half-hearted disciple, and now we will see Jesus rebuke a great storm of nature and his fearful crew.

“*And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him*” (Matthew 8:23). This verse flows out from the verses before it. Last week we read of two men had sought to follow Jesus; but Jesus rebuked both of them because they had not considered to count the true cost of following Jesus. To be a “*disciple*” of Jesus means to be a humble, surrendered, sacrificial “*follower*” of Jesus. That means to go where Jesus says to go, do what he says to do, and believe as he says to believe. Sadly, not everyone is willing to accept the cost of following Jesus. But the men who entered the boat with Jesus did. When he got into the boat, they “*followed him.*” Matthew calls them “*disciples*” because that’s what Jesus’ followers do.

*“And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, ‘Save us, Lord; we are perishing.’”* (Matthew 8:24-25). Here we see the crucial importance of considering the cost of following Jesus - because when we do humbly surrender our hearts to Jesus and when we do sacrificially commit our lives to following Jesus - *“great storms”* will come. Matthew emphasizes this by describing the storm as *“a great storm.”* This would have been true because the Sea of Galilee is a very unusual body of water. The pear-shaped lake is small - eight miles east to west and 13 miles from north to south - and it is 150 feet deep and is 680 feet below sea level. Water gushes down to the sea from over 9,000 feet from the plateau of Mount Herman, cutting deep ravines in the foothills. These ravines act like funnels drawing violent winds down from the heights onto the lake without warning. The word *“Behold”* indicates the sudden nature of this storm.

Consider it could have been a day when all day long there had not been a breath of moving air. The sultry heat like that of a furnace steaming the air up. A cool breeze then toward evening is pulled off the mountains into the vacuum created by the super-heated air vacating the surface. Faster and faster the displacement takes place until it becomes a gale shooting down the ravines and rushing across the lake. The whipping turbulence catches up the water and waves begin to mount up. White-capped waves crash against the small boat; then the wild whistling blast forms billows that as our text says covered the boat with waves. Suddenly storms could easily stir the water into violent waves 8 meters (25 feet) high. We see the intensity of the storm in the Greek word here translated *“great storm”* is *seismus megas* which literally means “mega storm.” The Greek word *seismus* is where our English word seismograph (a machine for measuring earthquakes) and seismology (the study of earthquakes) comes from.

The intensity of the wind stirred the sea until the whole boat shook as if experiencing an earthquake. It was a great seaquake. The severity of the storm is also seen even in that veteran fishermen/seamen like Peter, Andrew, James, and John were frantic bailing out of water, fearing they were about to die. In Mark 4:37-39 we read there was *“a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’”* In Luke 8:23-24 we read *“a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. And they went and woke him, saying, ‘Master, Master, we are perishing!’”* We can only imagine the terror these men experienced in that boat. And we can only wonder what they were thinking - in that they were in the midst of an earthquake like storm *because* they were faithfully following Jesus. They were obeying the Son of God, the Savior of the World, the Sovereign King of the universe – and yet, a violent, life-threatening storm falls upon them.

Again, just like suffering, we should never ever think that just because we’re following Jesus, we have a right to expect to be exempt from the storms of life. Jesus could have prevented the storm from coming at all, but he didn’t. His disciples were following Him - and He led them right into a storm. Why would Jesus do that? We need to keep in mind that Jesus has greater things in mind for his followers than they have for themselves. We have it in our mind that we “ought” to have a comfortable ride with him. But Jesus knows that, and as his followers in training, we need to get caught in some storms now and then – so that we can learn more about Him and grow closer to him in an experiential way. God knows just the right time to lead us into a storm; and He knows just what we need to learn and where we need to grow closer to him in that storm – so we might love Him and trust Him and serve Him, more and more and more. In James 1:2-4 the brother of Jesus wrote: *“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.”* The disciples did not have a full and complete picture of what getting into the boat meant, but they knew that they loved Jesus and believed Jesus and they were willing to follow him no matter what the future held. Much like a child getting into the back seat of a car, the child places their trust fully in their parents to drive that car safely to their next destination. The disciples did not know stepping into that boat meant they would have to pass through a terrible storm. They only knew that Jesus was in the boat, and they wanted to be with him.

In the spirit of what God is telling us today in His Word, we all need to consider that most of us here today, from one degree or another, have made the decision to follow Jesus. We've accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and we have committed ourselves to following Jesus. We've chosen to be identified as disciples of Jesus Christ and we are here in church on Sunday morning worshipping Jesus Christ. But none of us has a full picture of what that may mean for us today or tomorrow or next week or next month or in the years to come. Hopefully, to the best of our abilities, we've considered and counted the cost, and, to varying degrees, we've joined our Lord Jesus on His mission. What that means is that if we are truly following Jesus - our commitment to him, our trust in him and love for Him will be tested. About this the apostle Peter writes: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls"* (1 Peter 1:3-9).

Pastor and evangelist F. B. Meyer explained this concept this way: "A bar of iron is worth \$2.50, but when you bend it and shape it into horseshoes it is worth \$5. If made into needles it is worth \$175. If into penknife blades it is worth \$1,625. If made into springs for watches it is worth \$125,000. What a 'trial by fire' the iron bar must undergo to be worth that much! But the more it is manipulated, and the more it is hammered and passed through the heat, beaten, pounded, and polished, the greater its value." Pastor/theologian P.T. Forsyth said this: "Unless there is within us that which is above us, we shall soon yield to that which is about us. Trials for the Christian in the hand of a loving Lord can bring forth in us the very life of Christ. But in order for those changes to occur, we must be in the boat with Christ, and we must pass through the storm with Him." Everyone, whether Christian or not, will face storms in life. The truth is - even non-believers can grow through the storms they encounter. But storms for those committed to following of Jesus come from the hands of a Sovereign God, for a much higher purpose.

We see that purpose in the contrast between Jesus and his disciples in the midst of a violent, earthquake like storm in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. While the disciples are frantically struggling against the wind and the waves, bailing water, rowing with all their might, trying to get the sails down before they are capsized - Jesus is sleeping. In his humanness, Jesus was most likely sound asleep - tired from the hard spiritual, mental, emotional, physical work of ministry he had done over the past day. But in the midst of the "great storm" Jesus is fast asleep. Despite the turbulent weather, all is well - God is still on His throne. Jesus had faith in His father to give him the rest he needed, and he trusted His father would protect him from any and all storms of life that threatened him. But it was not so for Jesus' disciples. In great terror and mortal fear *"they went and woke him, saying, 'Save us, Lord; we are perishing.'"*

While the broken abruptness of the disciples' appeal to Jesus reveals their perceived urgency of their situation - we see two things at work here. First, the disciples were panicked because they feared the possibility of death - which reveals a lack of their understanding of God's mission for their lives and God's ability to protect them while they on that mission. Second, the disciples realized in some way that Jesus had power to save them. "Save us" are words of faith and "we are perishing" are words of fear, a strange combination. Yet it is often because of *fear* that we are driven to seek the One who can *save* us. They knew *who* to go to, yet they had no real faith in what Jesus *could do* in their desperate situation. They put little trust in Jesus' presence - not realizing that God, in His providence, would not let Jesus die before his time. Though they may not have had sufficient faith that Jesus could do anything against the storm, they became aware of *their helplessness and dependence on God* - the key ingredients of our faith in God through Jesus Christ. If we claim to be followers of Jesus, he will test our faith in him.

*“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. And the men marveled, saying, ‘What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?’”* (Matthew 8:26-27). Once awakened by the disciples, Jesus did not immediately respond to their plea for deliverance from the storm, as would be expected. Instead Jesus first rebuked the disciples, and then he rebuked the storm. The disciples’ fears were stimulated by circumstances beyond their control. It is our human tendency to use our circumstances as an excuse for our actions and our reactions. But in this circumstance his disciples reacted with *fear* rather than *faith* – and so Jesus used the circumstance of a “*great storm*” to strengthen their faith by rebuking them for their lack of faith.

The disciples had faith in Jesus until they experienced things that according to their opinion would surely bring death. They judged Jesus on the basis of their immediate circumstances and needs - rather than upon the power and authority already seen in what Jesus had said and done. They failed to realize that Jesus’ power was greater than this newly encountered threat and danger. They judged Jesus’ concern for them based on the comfort, security and safety of how they perceived their circumstances. The less safe and secure and comfortable their circumstances, the weaker their faith. But faith contends with problems beyond our control by engaging God’s power. The most critical need of Jesus’ disciples was the strength and quality of their faith, which is directly proportionate to the depth and accuracy of their perception of Jesus, the object of their faith. And so Jesus chided them. He called them as fearful cowards and challenged them to see who he really was and put their faith in him and grow beyond their frail, fallen, fearful perceptions. Notice Jesus didn’t fault their fear but rebuked them that their fear overcame their faith. Our Lord Jesus wants our faith in him to have control over our panicked spirits. Jesus yielded to his disciples cry from an imperfect faith. If he did not do so for us, we would be hooped.

Then Jesus stood up in a boat being tossed around and flooded by the waves and “*rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.*” Mark records Jesus’ words of command as “*Peace! Be still!*” which is literally “be silent, be muzzled!” in the Greek (Mark 4:36). The personal nature of the verb “*rebuked*” suggests that Jesus was treating the violent forces of nature as demonic. The result of Jesus’ command is that the wind and sea became perfectly calm. The result was immediate and complete. The giant swells in the sea from gale force winds instantaneously become placid water. There had been a “*great*” storm and now there was “*great*” calm. Normally after wind diminishes waves continue to surge and subside for some time but here a supernatural calm comes over a previously out of control nature. Here Jesus demonstrated his absolute authority over the natural world – revealing he is the Sovereign King over all the earth, over all the world, over all the universe. In Psalm 89:8-9 the psalmist proclaims: “*O LORD God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O LORD, with your faithfulness all around you? You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.*” Colossians 1:15-17 tells us that Jesus our Sovereign King “*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 the men marveled, saying, ‘What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?’”* (Matthew 8:27). Because of the storm, the disciples entered into a new awareness of who Jesus was. The disciples here become more aware of the awesome power and authority of their Lord. Evidently, even when they awakened him, they did not expect to see Jesus’ unparalleled display of power over nature. He exercised such authority over nature in the midst of fear and uncertainty. Much on the earth can be corrected. Mothers can dry tears, carpenters can fix damage doors, surgeons can remove diseased tissues, yet no one can fix or control the weather. But Jesus is no mere man. Jesus is wondrously unique among all human beings. Though he was fatigued and slept in exhaustion, he rose and calmed a great storm – reflecting the day when would surrender his life into the sleep of death by being crucified on a cross for our sins in our place - and then rise from the dead, defeating the violent, deadly storms of sin, evil and death – so that those who desperately and dependently cry out to him will be saved, so they might know the calm of Gods mercy, grace, love, forgiveness, peace, joy, redemption and restoration back to God.

Those of us who claim to be followers/disciples of Jesus must be focused on the power of Jesus, not the power of the storms of life, which sometimes threaten to overcome us. Sometimes it may seem as if Jesus is asleep in the midst of the storm, but it's at such times we must put our faith in the one who is always present, always aware, always able handle the difficulties and calm the storms and give us his peace whenever he pleases – for our good and his glory. In Romans 5:1-5 the apostle Paul writes: *“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”*

If we are ever going to grow in maturity as a disciples, followers of Jesus Christ, we must be willing to let our Lord Jesus carry us into and through the storms we encounter in life. And we must be willing and eager to seek out/look for Jesus in the midst of all of our storms. There's a story told about a child psychologist who wanted to observe how different children respond to negative circumstances. And so, the psychologist got a room and filled it with horse manure and he put a child in the room and observed how he responded. The child responded by whining and crying in despair because the room was full of smelly manure. And so, the psychologist put another child in the room, and he joyfully started running around the room, digging in the manure with an excitement that baffled the psychologist and those looking on. After a few moments of watching this, they asked the child why he was so excited. He said, "With all this manure in the room, there's got to be a pony in here somewhere!" Regardless of any mess we might find ourselves in here on earth, and in spite of whatever kind of storm we find ourselves in, Jesus is always present, always with us - and he has unparalleled authority over whatever we are facing.

Some day we will be done with our voyage to the other side of life. On that day we will be done with the fearful storms we encounter in the seas of life - and we will make our harbor in the haven of rest with our Lord Jesus. Yet while we are still here we need to get a greater understanding of the One who leads us to the other side. For just as certain as it occurred then for those who called him Lord and asked him to save them from the storm, so too will Jesus calm the storms of life for us, whether they be external or internal. The grace of God in all of this is that sometimes he calms the storms and sometimes he calms us in the midst of the storms. Though we may think him heedless to the storms in our lives, Jesus is the one who leads us into the storms ,and he uses them to both test our faith and strengthen our faith. If we will cry out to him in faith, even if our faith is mixed with fear, Jesus, the Sovereign King and Prince of Peace will come and calm the storms we encounter in this life – until we go home into the life beyond.

The evangelical Anglican theologian, Handley Moule writes: *“There is no situation so chaotic that God cannot from that situation, create something that is surpassingly good. He did it at the creation. He did it at the cross. He is doing it today.”* Or as another man once said: *"The problems that are over my head are under the feet of Jesus."* Storms in life are not bad, they are necessary. The storm clouds of fear and struggle and suffering may at times threaten to engulf us with fear for ourselves rather than faith in Jesus Christ. But when we recognize that the storms of life are in fact part of God's wise design and that they are under His sovereign control - those same storms may in fact bring showers of blessing. Jesus promised us that he would always be with us, and that has God a plan and a purpose for our lives – and God's plans and purposes will always include storms that will hit us right between the eyes. Jesus Christ, Sovereign King, Prince of Peace, Lord and Savior, is greater than any storms we may ever face. *“O LORD God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O LORD, with your faithfulness all around you? You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.”* Psalm 89:8-9