

FAITH THAT OVERCOMES STORMS

Mark 4:35-41

Key Verse: 40, “He said to his disciples, ‘Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?’”

In the year 1736, John Wesley was on board a ship, crossing the Atlantic Ocean. The ship was struck by a terrifying storm. John was afraid to die. A group of Moravian Christians were singing. He later asked one of them if they were afraid. The man replied, “No; our women and children are not afraid to die.” John was deeply impressed by them. At the same time, he was deeply disturbed by his own fear of death, though he was a Christian.¹

In today’s Bible passage, Jesus’ disciples were caught in a sudden storm in a smaller boat on a smaller lake. Even so, it was bad enough to threaten their lives. The disciples were afraid to die. Jesus was sleeping on the boat. We know the rest of the story. Through this event, we want to deepen our faith in who Jesus is and the faith that overcomes storms.

First, “Quiet! Be still!” (35-39) Recall that Jesus had been speaking in parables to the crowds, parables of the kingdom of heaven—the sower and the four soils, the lamp on a stand, the growing seed and the mustard seed. That day, when evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” So, leaving the crowd behind, they took Jesus along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.

Why did Jesus want to go to the other side of the lake? It seems that the demands of the crowds were just too much for Jesus and his disciples. It seems that they needed a break, a furlough, some time off. This week I read the biography of Jonathan Goforth by his wife Rosalind, who were both Canadian Presbyterian missionaries to China from 1888-1935. Life and missionary work in China in 1900 was difficult for them, and they lost 5 of their 11 children to sickness. Jonathan was wounded during a vicious attack during the Boxer Rebellion, a time when all foreigners in China were driven out or killed. During their mission life in China, it was often only times of severe sickness that gave them much-needed missionary furlough back to Canada on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. That was their limited time of rest from the demands of the mission life in China. Jonathan Goforth went blind one year before his passing. His last message preached was at a local gathering on the topic, “How the Spirit’s Fire Swept Korea.”² He died peacefully in his sleep before the next morning at the age of 77.

¹ Taken from <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/history/a-storm-at-sea/>, and, “John Wesley: The Great Methodist,” Wellman, Sam; Barbour Publishing, 1997, pp.68-72.

² “Jonathan Goforth,” Goforth, Rosalind; Bethany House Publ., 1986, p.156.

So it seems Jesus wanted to give himself and his disciples some rest. But it was only partially fulfilled. Suddenly, a furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. We know that at least 4 of Jesus' disciples were experienced fishermen. So they must've been quite familiar with this kind of storm activity on the Sea of Galilee.

Verse 38 gives us a sharp contrast between Jesus and his disciples. It says, "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?'" Jesus was in the back of the boat, sleeping on a cushion. Isn't it surprising that Jesus was sleeping through this storm? Maybe you've heard the saying: "sleep like a log," or, "sleep like a baby," or "sleep through a storm." Usually people don't mean it literally. But Jesus was literally sleeping through a storm, not in a comfortable bed in a house, but in a rocking boat on the Sea of Galilee. Maybe to Jesus the rocking of the boat was like a baby being rocked to sleep in a cradle. It sounds funny. But it wasn't funny to the disciples. It was a serious storm.

But before we talk about the disciples, let's consider Jesus. What does the fact that he was sleeping in this storm show about him? For one thing, it shows that Jesus was really exhausted. It shows Jesus' full humanity. He was tired. He worked hard and he needed rest. Jesus had to sleep. God does not slumber or sleep, the Bible says. And Jesus was indeed God. But Jesus was also human, fully human.

Another thing it shows about Jesus is that he is the Prince of Peace. Jesus had no worry or fear. He was sleeping soundly, though humanly, even according to experienced fishermen, he was in great danger. The boat could've sunk. They were in real danger of drowning. But Jesus had no fear. Jesus had absolute faith and trust in his Father God. But there is more, which we shall soon see.

Look at verse 39. "[Jesus] got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm." What just happened there? It is not normal human behavior to speak to storms. I have yet to hear a TV news weather person say, "This is the expected forecast, unless someone of great faith speaks to the cold front moving in to Chicago." But Jesus rebuked the wind and waters saying, "Hush! Be quiet!" or to translate this into typical librarian English, "Shhh!" It was as if Jesus was quieting a loud, unruly, mischievous child: "Silence!" It also reminds us of something earlier. In the Capernaum synagogue, a man with an impure spirit cried out, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek (1:24-25).

Jesus' words have divine authority to command demons and to command the wind and the waves. We know that only God has this kind of authority, for God created and controls heaven and earth, land and sea. Jesus showed that he is Lord of the sea. Jesus was not shaken by the storm. Rather, Jesus controlled the storm. The wind and

the waves had to obey his will: Peace! Be still!” There’s a beautiful song called “Master the Tempest Is Raging,” which addresses this passage of Scripture:

The winds and the waves shall obey thy will: Peace! Be still! Whether the wrath of the storm-tossed sea, or demons or men or whatever it be. No waters can swallow the ship where lies the Master of ocean and earth and skies. They all shall sweetly obey thy will: Peace! Be still! Peace! Be still! They all shall sweetly obey thy will: Peace! Peace! Be still!

Have you been through any storms in your life? If you haven’t, you most certainly will. Jesus can calm any storm by his command: “Quiet! Be still!” A storm is something that we have no or very limited human control over. We might feel helpless or powerless or afraid before the storm. It could be a health issue or death in the family, a job or financial crisis, a relationship problem, a loved one’s dire circumstance, a difficult exam, or a serious temptation. It is easy and natural to be shaken by difficult or challenging or seemingly impossible situations or circumstances.

Do you feel you are in a storm now in your family? In your fellowship or ministry? In our church? In our nation? In the world? There are so many storms that can make us afraid, or make us feel helpless or powerless. Maybe we’re afraid of failure, afraid of wasted time or fruitless efforts, afraid of suffering or loss or death. We may be tempted to say, like Jesus’ disciples, “Jesus, don’t you care about me, my family, our church, our nation?”

1 Peter 5:7 has an answer for us: “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” Don’t you care, Lord Jesus? Yes, he does care. And he is Lord of all. Thank you Lord Jesus, that you care. You are trustworthy. I trust in you.

For me personally, it’s easy for me to feel frustrated or helpless regarding stormy relationships I encounter in ministry as I serve both believers and those who have yet to trust in Christ as Lord and Savior. Sometimes I don’t know what to do. In truth, I know I can’t do anything to calm the storm. Here I am comforted to see that it’s not my job to calm the storm. That’s Jesus’ job. My task is to have faith and trust in Jesus, the Storm-Calmer. So my aim, as our 2021 Chicago UBF key verse says in Hebrews 12:2, must be to fix my eyes on Jesus and trust him more. I also see I need to do whatever I can to help others to trust in Jesus, the Storm-Calmer, as well. May we all put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is able to calm any storm.

Second, faith that overcomes fear (40-41). Jesus had already driven out demons from people and healed many people including people with leprosy, paralysis, a shriveled hand, and other sicknesses and diseases. The disciples had seen the power and mercy of God in Jesus. Yet, apparently, it wasn’t enough for them to overcome their fear in the time of storm.

Jesus said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” Jesus diagnosed their fear as a faith problem. This is what John Wesley recognized on his

stormy voyage across the Atlantic. In a biography chapter titled, “A Crushing Revelation,” Wesley asked the Moravian leader, “How is it the youngest Moravian has no fear of death, and I am fearful?” “My brother,” he replied, “do you know Jesus Christ?” “I know he is the Savior of the world,” said Wesley. “True, but do you know he has saved you?” “I do,” John answered, but now he knew in his heart he did not know that. He believed it only with his head. Deep inside, he did not believe Jesus had specifically died for him, John Wesley. What a crushing revelation!”³

Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith? Jesus is telling us the antidote or remedy to the fear of death. It is faith in God. It is faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus wanted his disciples to have personal, independent faith in God—faith that God loves them, God cares for them, God watches over them. Jesus wanted them to have this same faith and trust in him: Jesus loves us, Jesus cares for us, Jesus watches over us. Sometimes it doesn’t feel like that. Sometimes our circumstances are not favorable. They are not the way we wish or hope for things to be happening for us or around us.

By the way, why do we get so afraid? Or why do we worry? Is it not because we think we have to be in control of our lives? That could be the problem, because there are things, there are times in our lives when we have little or no control over the outcome. We don’t have enough money or wisdom or power or clout to influence the outcome. We really are helpless, like a boat in a storm.

At the root of all fears is the fear of suffering and death. The devil keeps people in slavery to the fear of death (Heb 2:15). Jesus’ death and resurrection broke that power of death held by the devil. Jesus gives us hope. Jesus gives us freedom. Jesus gives us victory over fear, since he conquered sin and death and the devil. There is victory in Jesus. There is peace in Jesus. Everybody wants victory. Everybody wants peace. Thus, everybody needs Jesus, our victory and our peace.

Psalm 91 speaks of this trust in God that overcomes fear. Verses 7,9-10 read: A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you....If you say, ‘The LORD is my refuge,’ and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent.”

Isaiah 26:3 speaks similarly of the trust in God that gives peace: “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.” God gives us peace when we trust in him, rather than trusting in ourselves, or what we have in this world, or what we do.

Let me share the words of another song, which contain I believe the secret to this peace and victory. The song is “His Eye Is On the Sparrow.” The refrain says, “I sing because I’m happy, I sing because I’m free. For his eye is on the sparrow, and I know he

³ “John Wesley: The Great Methodist,” Wellman, Sam; Barbour Publishing, 1997, p.73.

watches me.” When we believe and hold to God’s love for us personally, we can sing with joy and peace.

Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith? Jesus wants us to not be afraid, but to have faith in God, and faith in him. On the night before Jesus died, he told his disciples, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me” (Jn 14:1).

Then how can we trust in God or have faith in God? I believe there are 3 things that we must do. Firstly, we must confess our sins. Sin is anything contrary to God’s will and character in word, thought and action, morally, ethically and spiritually. Sin is living for ourselves without caring about God or others, but rather living for our own pleasure, our own comfort, our own glory. So we express faith in God by first confessing, “Lord Jesus, I’m a sinner, have mercy on me.” Secondly, we must accept Jesus’ love and sacrifice for us personally. This was the crushing revelation that John Wesley discovered. Jesus not only died for sinners, he died for you, he died for me. His death was to pay for and take away my sins, even mine, even yours! So we say, “Thank you, Lord Jesus, for dying on the cross for my sins, to wash my sins away.” Thirdly, we must commit our lives to Jesus Christ to live for him, not for my own pleasure or glory. So we pray, “Lord Jesus, you are my King, my Lord, my loving Father. I trust in you. I love you. I want to know you and be like you, more and more. Conform me to your image. I give my life to you. Make my life a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to you.”

How did the disciples respond to Jesus’ rebuke: “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” The Bible says, “They were terrified and asked each other, ‘Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!’” They wondered about Jesus’ true identity. Who is he, that winds and waves hear and obey his words?”

Of course, Jesus is more than just a prophet or spokesman for God. Prophets can pray or speak in the name of the Lord, but they have no authority to speak on their own. Jesus spoke on his own authority, because he is Lord of all. How about us? Do we have authority? We have no authority of our own. But we who belong to Jesus have Jesus’ name as our authority. Jesus’ name is our defense, our confidence, our joy, our hope, our victory, our salvation, our story and our song, our blessed assurance. Jesus is our Savior and Lord. There is no fear in Jesus. There is victory in Jesus. There is peace in Jesus. There is salvation in Jesus.

Praise and thanks be to Jesus who calms all our storms and fears by his words of grace and truth: “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith? Quiet! Be still!”