

## **Facing the Storms of Life** Matthew 8:23-27

The Sea of Galilee is well known, even today for its sudden violent storms. It is 680 feet below ocean level. It is within a deep valley or cleft, with mountains all around. And the valleys and gully's that point into the sea, compress the winds, so the storms combine suddenness and violence in a unique way. The Greek word used here for storm is the same word that is used for earthquake. So, it's not unusual for the waves to quickly become higher than the boat.

One of the well-known stories about Jesus and the disciples is when their boat was sinking on the Sea of Galilee because of a storm. Today we are using the metaphor of a physical storm for our storms in life. So, what storms have you experienced in your lifetime? What are some storms your parents experienced? Or a friend?

We could list all kinds of things. Bad health news. Accidents. Crop failures. Miscarriages. Divorce. Someone doing something we object to. Financial failures that we cannot manage that are beyond our control. Arguments that break out & even destroy relationships. Government decisions that turn into disaster. A bad boss. We could list a whole bunch of storms – include hail, droughts, wind, and floods. Some storms are surprises and others we can see coming like a tornado. There are violent and natural disasters we see – like a volcano erupting or rebellion.

**The key question is how do we respond?** The story of Jesus calming the storm seems to have had such an impact on the disciples, that it is recorded in 3 of the Gospels. We can use them to get a fuller picture of what occurred.

One of the impressive things about Jesus is he never wasted an opportunity and a miracle to teach people. We can find some basics on how to deal with a crisis from this event. So first, **what categories of storms do we face in life?** There are at least three we could list, and I suspect we could name others.

There are *situational storms*. These are when circumstances arise, and everything seems to go

wrong. They just pop up, or you can fear that you cannot avoid a storm. Rationing in war time is one example. Inflation. We could list others. Simply put, many things can go wrong in a short time. Like the time my youngest daughter almost died – three times in two weeks. Proverbs 12:27 describes this: “When calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you.”

Then there are *relationship storms*. Tension between people comes up. It can be anything, from a major issue to a simple disagreement. How and to whom is a farm passed on? Mask or no mask? Children feel their parents favor some other child. Jealousy among siblings or between friends or at work. A new government that we resist. An employer that keeps treating us badly. The list of relationship failures is endless. David in the Psalms often felt alone & that his enemies were ganging up against him and he had no one supporting him. Like when his son Absalom led a rebellious army against him.

And a third category of storm we face in life is, *emotional storms*. These are often unseen but are felt. We try to hide these storms, so our public face is calm. Sometimes we even fool ourselves until someone asks, “What’s wrong?” Or we react in some way that makes us realize we have worry, jealousy, anger, fear, guilt, old undealt hurts, or bitterness that are kept under neath our surfaces. Usually, they pop out in the most surprising times and unusual ways. It’s not unusual for us to feel “upgamixed” as we try to sort out our feelings and not do what Eve and Adam did – blame. Since we are created to have emotions, we have emotional storms.

We have listed 3 categories of storms in our lives and you may want to add another one. Now let’s look at storms from another angle. **The Bible recognizes storms in our lives will occur.** We do experience them – despite how hard we try to prevent them or deny them when they occur.

**First the Bible tells us storms in life are inevitable.** If you are not in a storm right now – just wait! James 1:2 tells us, “When you face

trials.” This is in the context of following Jesus, but we have all lived long enough to know, storms rise up. In a sense, we could say Ryan’s observations and recommendations may feel like a storm. I urge you to read Scott Peck’s book, *The Road Less Traveled*. It’s a wonderful book. The first sentence goes, “Life is difficult.” That is one of the best openings of a book I know.

Storms in life are inevitable and ***second, they are unpredictable***. They come unexpectedly, suddenly and they are often unpredictable. In our story today, verse 24 says, “Without warning a furious storm came up.” Surprise! Even though we try hard to not have unpleasant surprises, they still occur. Some people depend on their astrology sign to plan their day. Others have paranoid habits and rituals to ward off evil. Some carry a lucky rabbit’s foot or some other item like prayer beads to protect themselves. But we can’t predict storms like a plane crash.

***Third, much of the Bible’s purpose is to warn us of predictable storms***. When we sin, bad things will happen to us. When we don’t pay attention to the laws of nature, bad things will happen to us. Many of these storms are not inevitable – they can be avoided. But still we get surprised when our health fails when they are linked to bad habits. Or the consequences when we resist a mean employer, or when we don’t pay our bills, or a violent government, and so on. There are always people who despite their habits, personality, lifestyle and ways of doing things, seem fine. But the odds are, life is difficult at some point, in some ways, for everyone!

A ***fourth truism*** that’s important to acknowledge is, ***storms are impartial***. They are not fair. They happen to good and too bad people. They happen to all of us. Matthew 5:45 tells us, “Our Creator sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” The Almighty shows his love on everyone. A follower of Jesus is not exempted from storms. Why does my roof blow off and yours does not?

Now it’s important to say this: there is the false idea that when people have a tough time, it is because they are sinning, disobeying God. It

might be, but it also might not be. The disciples had Jesus with them, but a storm still came up. They had not done anything wrong. We are not promised a storm free life. We have choices to make, accidents occur, our emotions are not always in our control, situations are beyond our power, and so on. This is not heaven, where life is perfect, stress free, just, and love abounds.

So, since storms are inevitable, unpredictable, and impartial, the issue is, ***how do we respond?*** When storms occur, whatever they may be, we can respond like the disciples or like Jesus.

***One response to a storm is we can panic***. The disciples clearly thought their minutes were numbered. Even though they were experienced fishermen. They had probably been on the Sea of Galilee all their life, so they knew this sudden storm was life threatening. It scared them to death. They said to Jesus, “We are going to drown!” The waves were seeping into the boat and the disciples panicked.

***Or we can respond to a storm like Jesus***. What was he doing? He was not concerned at all. In fact, he was sleeping. That’s how tired he was. The big wave action was helping him sleep instead of causing sea sickness.

It is ironic that Jesus was sleeping during the storm, because when we are in a storm, we are not sleeping well. We lay awake at night, upset, tossing and turning, going over a problem in our minds, trying to figure things out. When we do sleep, it tends to be a shallow sleep – not a deep restful sleep. Even our dreams are focused on disasters, which unsettle us even more.

Do you know what Canadians spend on sleep aids? An old statistic says insomnia takes a bite out of the Canadian economy at a cost of \$20 billion dollars a year, due to lost productivity and absenteeism among the sleep deprived. I could not find how much we spend on nonprescription and prescription drugs to help us get to sleep and keep us sleeping. But it is probably a lot!

Another even older article says, Canada is the third most sleep deprived county, with nearly a

third of Canadians feeling like they don't sleep enough. So, we must worry a lot and have a lot of sleep disorders because of the storms in our lives – even though we are a first world country.

We can be in a panic or at peace when we are in a storm. Easier said than done. Sleep may be the wrong response in a crisis! But can we accept sleeping can be a statement and posture of faith? We can say, "God, I'm turning this storm over to you. It is now our problem. I cannot handle it. It is too big for me. But I am not going to lose sleep over it." It's a statement of faith that God will calm my storm, instead of worrying. Jesus' sleeping is a sign of trust. The disciples interpret it as a lack of concern. When we feel our ship is sinking, what can we do? **How do we get from panic to peaceful sleep?**

**Remember, Jesus is close.** We are not by ourselves. Verse 23. "Then Jesus got into the boat and his disciples followed him." The disciples had seen Jesus do many miracles, so they woke him up to get his help. Was God going to let the boat sink with Jesus in it? If we are going to make it through a storm, we first must learn and depend on: The Almighty God is with us. We are not alone, even if we feel lonely. We have the Holy Spirit to help us.

There is nothing we face alone – when we call on Jesus. God is always nearby. There are lots of promises in verses that we can count on. In Matthew 28:20 Jesus promised, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." God in Hebrews 13:5 says to us, "I will never forsake you or abandon you."

And then there are the wonderful words from Isaiah 43: verses 1 to 3. "But now, this is what the Lord says, he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you Israel, he brought you this far North Star: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."

So, our job as followers of Jesus is to remember, Jesus is always with us, he is close by, he is in the boat of our situation with us.

To respond to the storms by peaceful sleep, **we need to relax in God's care.** When we are in a storm, it's normal to wonder, does God care? Is he asleep? Does he even notice my situation? When I look at the world and see all the victims of power and natural disasters, I must wonder, where is the Almighty? Don't you care? And how do people in storms think about God?

The disciples asked the same question. "Jesus, don't you care if we drown?" The answer is, "Of course he cares." Our Creator sees what is going on and hurts with us. This is what faith requires. We need to remember God is close by and cares. It's good to remind ourselves of this – repeatedly

This is why regular reading of the Bible is so important. We must believe and trust in the over 7,000 promises in the Bible. Believing in them must be part of our inner nature of faith. This keeps Satan's doubts from going anywhere. This way, temptations to think God does not care, find no fertile ground. The one thing the disciples did right in this story is they took their fear to Jesus.

They did as I Peter 5:7 tells us to: "Cast all your anxiety on Him because he cares for you." They did not go look for other people for help. They did not look for other solutions. They simply remembered Jesus was close by in their boat and they asked for help and relaxed in Jesus' care.

**The third way to respond in a storm like Jesus, is rely on God's control.** Let's rely on God's power to see us through. Verse 26. "Jesus got up, rebuked the winds and the waves and it was completely calm." Notice the story tells us that both the wind and the waves became calm. That never happens after a storm. There was the miracle of the wind stopping. But instead of the waves slowly dying down, they instantly became calm. That's the second miracle.

Fear comes when we experience things in life that are beyond our control. This always frightens us. There are lots of things in life to be

frightened about. But the good news is we are never beyond God's control. This is where we put our faith. Jeremiah 32:17 says, "Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you."

Before they pushed off from shore, Jesus said to the disciples, "Let's go to the other side." But Jesus did not say it would be an easy trip. He did not say they would not get wet. He did not say it would be a safe trip. He did not say they would not have a scare. But he said, "Let's go to the other side, as if they were going to make it." Life is like this. We don't know what the trip will be like, but we are promised we will get across to the other side.

Notice what Jesus accused the disciples of. Verse 26. "You of little faith. Why are you so afraid?" This tells us their root problem was fear. The solution to the problem is faith. The secret of victory over fear is trust.

And it's not the amount of faith we have. It is what we put into trust that makes a difference. Everyone has faith. We had trust when we ate breakfast that it wasn't poisoned. We had faith when we came to church that no one would run us over and that our vehicles would work. Everyone has faith. It's just what we put into our faith in our daily lives that makes a difference. As Jesus challenged the disciples, he challenges us, "Put in a lot of the right faith and trust."

It is worth noting that no where in the Bible do we find someone with too much faith. Does Jesus ever rebuke someone for having too much faith? The problem always is a lack of faith. The Almighty is pleased when we go to our limit, and we know it is impossible, and then God says, "Go for it," because then he gets the opportunity to show His power. Maybe we can say, "We have never believed God, until we have done something that is beyond all our own power and all the logical possibilities."

Too often, followers of Jesus live lives that require no faith. They are not risking anything. They are not attempting anything. They are not

learning anything new to acquire new or better skills to further God's Kingdom. And they are simply not putting in the time needed. But the Bible says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." Hebrews 11:6.

This is simply much more than an interesting story. Jesus wants his disciples to learn by experience. To get into the boat. To risk being on the lake. He could have moved inland away from the storm. He knew it was coming. But he wanted them and us to learn, God solves problems. We can have help against fears. We will never see God's power unless we sense his presence intimately in the storms of life. So, take your storms to Jesus. He is close. He can help you relax. He will help you rely on God.

This is much more than a simple interesting story. The message of this story is not that Jesus calmed a storm. The meaning is that wherever Jesus is, the storms of life become calm and manageable. It means that in the presence of Jesus the most terrible tempests turn to peace. It means that in His presence there is peace, whatever storms may blow. Only Jesus can calm what ever restlessness or storm you have.

When the bleak wind of sorrow blows, there is calm and comfort in the presence of Jesus Christ. When the hot blast of passion blows, there is peace and security in the presence of Christ Jesus. When the storms of doubt seek to uproot the very foundations of faith, there is steady safety in the presence of Jesus Christ. When fear takes over our lives, there is trust and faith with Jesus. In every storm that shakes the human heart, there is peace with Jesus Christ.

Notice the final verse in this story. "The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" The answer is, he is the Son of the Most High God. Storms of life come and go. They don't last. But Jesus is always with you and me.