

## Lessons in the Storm

### Introduction

Let me share some context of our story today. Jesus and the Disciples had just discovered that John the Baptist had been beheaded by Herod and his family.

Matthew 14:12 (ESV) 12 And his disciples came and took the body and buried it, and they went and told Jesus.

So, on the day John the Baptist is killed, Jesus is told and He immediately is in front of the crowds to feed the 5000. When that is over, Jesus sends His disciples away while He goes away for solitude and prayer.

Jesus models for us what we are to do when we receive bad news. We find a place to be alone and process with God. While Jesus is alone praying and processing with the Father, the disciples find themselves in a storm on the water.

This moment in history is recorded by John, but it is also recorded in Mark and Matthew. Lets walk through all three of the accounts of this moment.

### The Story in John

John 6:15 (ESV) 15 Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

John 6:16–17 (ESV) 16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, 17 got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.

John 6:18–20 (ESV) 18 The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. 19 When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. 20 But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid."

John 6:19–21 (ESV) 19 When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. 20 But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." 21 Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

### The Story in Mark

Mark 6:45–46 (ESV) 45 Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. 46 And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray.

Mark 6:47–48 (ESV) 47 And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. 48 And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against

them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them,

Mark 6:48–50 (ESV) 49 but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, 50 for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

Mark 6:50–52 (ESV) 51 And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, 52 for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

### The Story in Matthew

Matthew 14:22–24 (ESV) 22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24 but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.

Matthew 14:25–27 (ESV) 25 And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. 26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

Matthew 14:28–30 (ESV) 28 And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” 29 He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.”

Matthew 14:31–33 (ESV) 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” 32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

### The combined accounts.

Jesus has just been informed of the death of John the Baptist. Because of His miracles many in the crowds were seeking to make Him king. So he retreated to a mountain to pray, dismissed the crowds, and notice this...He made his disciples get into the boat without Him. He sent His disciples across the Sea of Galilee in a boat.

It was nighttime and they were headed to Capernium. Even though the disciples were in an intense storm, Jesus kept His eyes on them.

The wind was against them and they were struggling. They rowed about 4 miles and well into the fourth watch of the night. Jesus let them stay in the storm a struggle for a long time. The 4th watch was 3-6am. They were in a storm for almost the entire night before Jesus came to them. And note, that Jesus intended to walk right past them.

When they saw Jesus they thought that He was a ghost and they were frightened. They all saw Him and they were all terrified. Perhaps they thought He was the grim reaper. They cried out in fear. Jesus immediately identifies Himself and tells them to not be afraid.

Note how Jesus identifies Himself. "It is I" No further explanation needed...well Peter required confirmation.

Only Matthew records Peter calling out to Jesus and then walking on the water. Peter apparently wanted confirmation. Lord IF it is you....

Peter apparently gets out of the boat not completely sure that it is Jesus. He begins to walk on water toward Jesus.

When Peter is almost to Jesus, he takes his eyes off of Jesus and looks at the storm. When his faith fails he begins to sink. Jesus reaches out and grabs his hand.

Jesus asks Peter why he doubted and then they got into the boat and the winds immediately ceased. At that exact moment they are miraculously teleported to their destination.

The disciples were astounded and worshiped Him....but we are told that they did not understand the loaves but their hearts were hardened.

In the first storm (Matthew 8:24), Jesus was present with them in the boat. But in this storm, He asks them to trust his unseen care and concern for them.

We don't sense the same fear in the disciples as with the first time Jesus calmed the seas. Here they seem simply frustrated, because they are doing what Jesus told them to do, but it is so hard, and it doesn't seem to be going anywhere.

So, they rowed hard for perhaps six to eight hours, and had only come a little more than half way across the lake (three or four miles).

### Things to Notice

Jesus allows the storms in our lives because sometimes that is the only way He can get us to listen to Him. When things get really hard and it is hard to stay committed, we often miss that we are right where Jesus wants us to be. We think that God owes us a wrinkle free life, but He owes us nothing but condemnation to Hell. That is what we are owed. But by His grace you have been saved.

They were in the storm and it was perhaps the storm of their lives. They thought Jesus had abandoned them....previously He was in the boat with them during a storm and He just nodded and spoke and creation relented....but now...it seemed to them that they were alone....and yet Jesus was watching over them every painstaking moment.

We so often feel that when we are doing the work of Jesus, it should be easy. After all, isn't God helping us? But sometimes, God tells us to do something and allows it to be hard as we do it.

If anything, the disciples were not ready for any kind of supernatural help. They knew what Jesus commanded them to do, they set out to do it, but without any help from the Lord. So they are surprised, even afraid, to see supernatural help on the way.

This is a perfect picture of us when we try to do God's will, but do it our way without seeking and relying on God's help. Jesus provided reminders for them of His supernatural help. Undoubtedly, they took with them at least some of the twelve baskets of leftover bread (John 6:13), yet they were still shocked when the supernatural help came.

For Jesus, it was enough to announce His presence. He came to bring supernatural help and comfort to His people. You can handle almost anything as long as you know that Jesus knows. When we are in the storms of our lives and our efforts are exhausting, our hope is fading, and we have exhausted all that we can do...we must learn that Jesus is working in us, for us and through us. Numerous times each week, my prayer is "God you got this, right?" That is the only thing I need to know. Peter would later write about the lesson that He learned in this moment...

1 Peter 4:12–13 (ESV) 12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

Jesus wouldn't turn a stone into bread to satisfy His own hunger, but he would multiply loaves and fishes to feed a hungry multitude. Jesus wouldn't cast Himself off the pinnacle of the temple to glorify Himself, but he would walk on the water to bring comfort to His disciples.

God's presence is all that we need, and we should expect it, though not in a way that we would necessarily expect.

Immediately the boat was at the land where they were going: Jesus, bringing His supernatural help, was able to miraculously overcome every obstacle that frustrated the disciples.

Jesus rescues the disciples from futility. Jesus wants us to work hard; but He never wants us to work in futility. On this occasion He came to rescue the disciples from futility, not from fear.

All the time the disciples struggled, Jesus watched over them. He watches over us at all times, and prays for us even when He seems distant. Jesus knew exactly what was going on, and He was monitoring their progress across the lake. He saw them straining at rowing, yet let them work at it for a good long time.

In this miracle, Jesus reassured us at the precise point where they needed to be reassured. The disciples had just seen Jesus turn down an offer to be king; they might have thought that this was why He came and why they were following Him!

Despite that disappointment, Jesus came to them full of majesty and power, reminding them that He is still quite in charge even though He won't receive a king's throne based on popular opinion.

Jesus came to them in the storm. And that is a time He comes to His own today. He makes Himself more real to us in a time of trouble and sorrow. I don't know why He waits until midnight, until the waves are rolling, but perhaps that is the only time we will listen to Him. When the storms of life are beating upon our little bark, our hearts are ready for His presence.

But there is something critical to notice here. Jesus was planning to walk past them and meet them on the other side. They would struggle in the storm until they cried out to Him for help. They would not see the miraculous until they acknowledged that they were at the end of themselves and needed Him to save them.

So many are worn out spiritually battling the storms that Jesus sent them into....and yet they have never surrendered to Him and admitted that they were defeated without Him.

"Immediately the ship was at the land whither they went." This may be another miracle, or John may mean that with no delay they reached the other side since the water was now calm. Or it may be the language of love—with Him in the boat it didn't seem far to the other side.

But this is the second time the disciples were exhausted, fearful and wet....but because Jesus was near the storm had become once again just the sound of water dripping off the mast. Just like the first storm...

Mark 4:39–41 (ESV) 39 And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. 40 He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" 41 And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

They were full of fear in the storm....now with God Himself rebuking creation...the were full of great fear...This man was God...and they knew it. This moment was recorded by the Psalmist.

Psalm 107:25–37 (ESV) 25 For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. 26 They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight; 27 they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end. 28 Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. 29 He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. 30 Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven.

Again, Jesus is fulfilling the role of God—feeding, protecting, rescuing, and guiding his followers despite the natural calamities that surround them

Questions surface the next day when the crowd discovers that although Jesus did not accompany the men on the boat, he nevertheless arrived with them at their destination

More boats arrive at the site of the feeding from nearby Tiberias, and when Jesus is not found, the people, charged with excitement, travel to Capernaum to see if he can be located. Their arrival in the village of Capernaum introduces Jesus' major "Bread of Life Discourse" (6:25–58), in which he defines carefully his relation to the miracle and its deeper meaning. We will cover that next week.

With the sea of hungry people miraculously fed, it would seem that the climate of popularity surrounding Jesus would smooth any waves of opposition. This has been a difficult day of ministry for Jesus. John the Baptist, His forerunner, has been beheaded....the first to die for the cause and a foreshadowing of what Jesus would experience soon. Ahead of Him is an ominous gathering of Pharisees and Saducees on the horizon. Spiritual storm clouds are brewing.

Jesus is on the mountain praying, bracing Himself for the storm that is to come. He sent the disciples to the other side of the lake because He needed to be alone. He needs time to pray, to mourn John, to seek strength for the storm to come. Not the one the disciples were struggling against in that moment, but the real storm that would move Him to the Cross.

There is a torrential gale force that is gathering against Him. This moment reminding us of a moment to come when Jesus in the midst of that Storm...Goes to a solitary place to pray and gain strength in the Garden of Gethsemane. That storm would calm with the words "It is finished" And even the Roman guard would know that God Himself had overcome.

While Jesus was seeking Spiritual strength, the disciples were in the midst of fear, frustration and futility. They rowed for ten hours and they only moved a discouraging three and one half miles.

In spite of the knives of pain in their backs, the cramps in their forearms, and the blood on their blistered hands, they were almost rowing in place...barely holding their ground.

The storm is raging....lightening bolts light up the sky and thunder echoes what seems like the cannon like voice of God or something worse. Picture them, the rain pelting their eyes, the chill of the rain, the intensity of sweat and fear...the utter exhaustion...the desire to give up...the fading hope...and yet there were right where God ordained them to be. They were finally at the end of themselves and ready to experience the miraculous of God.

They have not slept...perhaps they were hallucinating....They look through the rain in the darkness and see...is it a ghost? is it the arrival of death? Jews were very superstitious about raging seas. They saw the deep as a place of the demonic. Storms as an act of Satan....IT would never have dawned on them that they were dead center in the will of God. They cried out in Fear.

Then the ghost speaks.... "Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid"

They knew that voice. Jesus...in that moment they realized that Jesus was right there in the storm with them. Not far off in heaven, not disinterested in their plight, not unwilling to strive with them...He was not only God...He was God with us. And God moving toward us in the storm of our lives.

Peter knows two things and that is all that matters. He knows the voice of Jesus...and He knows that regardless of the storm...things would be ok...because the presence of Jesus is all that you need.

Peter wants to be with Jesus so badly, that He cannot wait. This moment is similar to one that would happen with resurrected Jesus at a breakfast.. Peter would say it is the Lord and then jump in the water to get to Him.

This time Jesus says come and Peter vaults over the port side and to the amazement of all the disciples, there is no splash, no swimming, no dogpaddling...The storm is raging but Peter in the presence and faith in Jesus...has risen above the storm and stands over it. Not in his power but in his faith...Please don't miss this.

No matter how bad the storm is in your life....you are one faith step away from rising above it in the power of Jesus.

Peter's eyes are transfixed and locked on Jesus. They had seen Jesus do some miraculous things, but now they see an ordinary man...their friend, doing the miraculous...doing what they thought only Jesus could do. At least as long as his faith supports him.

Peter's faith and trust increased with each step. He was only a yard or so away from Jesus and he took his eyes off of Jesus and focused on the storm. He would soon learn that the storm is not the issue, it is where you keep your eyes in the storm that matters. He was so close to Jesus when his faith faltered that Jesus could just reach out and grab him.

Once in the boat, the lesson to be learned is over. So what did they learn?

## Meditation

Peter had given all of them a visual demonstration of faith, for faith is stepping out in obedience to Jesus and looking to Him to sustain our steps, empower our faith and provide the strength to take another step even when we are wading over the storms of life.

Through Peter all of us learn the difference between walking by faith and walking by sight. When Peter kept his focus on Jesus he rose above the storm when he turned his eyes to the world...he sank. Jesus was preparing them and us for the future.

Undoubtedly, this storm on the Sea of Galilee loomed vivid in the disciples' minds as they would face the spiritual storm of mounting opposition. Like the actual storm, their encounter with the Pharisees and Sadducees was equally sudden, equally demanding in faith to keep their heads above water. Just as quickly as the winds changed on the sea, so the crowds turned inclemently against Jesus: the one day wanting to crown him king, the other day wanting to crucify him. But because of the lessons they learned that night, the disciples would be prepared for this sudden gust of resistance.

Peter would soon apply the lesson learned. When controversy stormed about the identify of Jesus, Peter would once again lock eyes with Jesus, rise above the growing storm and say "You are the Christ the Son of the living God"

They learned another lesson in this storm...Maybe it was years later when Jesus left them to ascend to t, he Father. Or perhaps it was in a quiet moment in the upper room. Here is what they learned.

The disciples would experience two physical storms in their 3 years with Jesus...In the first storm, Jesus is present but asleep. BUt in the next one, Jesus withdrew to a distant hill. Although He could easily see them...the blindfold of the physical kept them from seeing Him.

Why did Jesus allow them to experience the storm? Why did He put them through such a scary experience? Jesus had to wean them from sight to faith. To force them to rely less on what they see and more on what they know about Him.

If they were ever going to walk by faith, Jesus had to withdraw from their sight. Their roots of faith must grow deeper. They needed to experience the power of their faith so that they could learn to stand alone. They had to know their faith would support them whether they had Jesus beside them or not. Jesus had to take them through these storms to prepare them for the hurricane to come.

## Closing

So let's bring this home a bit. You and I are headed to a storm. Not some random act of Satan and not some punishment from God. The Holy Spirit will lead us into that storm....because it will be the best place for us to recognize our dependency upon Him and demonstrate our faith to others. Jesus was led into temptation in the wilderness not by Satan but by the Holy Spirit.

The disciples had a hard lesson to learn but one that must be chiseled in their faith. Within hours, their clothes would be dry....their shivering would stop...Within days...they would forget their sore backs, their blistered hands....But the lesson they learned that night...would sustain them forever.

There are lessons that we can only learn in the storm. It is in the storm that we discover if we can truly depend upon our foundation.

Yet there are only two reasons that we remain in the storms that Jesus leads us to. Either Jesus is still watching over us and teaching us...allowing us to get to the place where He has our undivided and surrendered attention. Jesus will leave us in the storm and walk past us if we don't cry out to Him.

You see the critical moment in the storm is not when Jesus comes to them, but when they decide to cry out in surrender and recognize their need to be rescued. Many people remain in the storm because they never truly surrendered and have never earnestly cried out in surrender.

So plan now for the storm that is on your horizon. Move past the why me question and embrace the God what are to trying to teach me that I can't learn anywhere else? What do I need to do

to get to the point of total surrender to your will in this storm. The reality is that if I could have surrendered on my own then you would not have needed to bring the storm and send me into it.

We saw the lesson Peter taught us earlier. Do not be surprised when you encounter storm in your life as if something odd was happening to you.

Jesus said...

John 16:33 (ESV) 33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

James would later record the lesson that He learned from Jesus about storms.

James 1:2–4 (ESV) 2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Let steadfastness have its full effect. Jesus allow whatever it takes in this storm to make me complete. The goal of any storm in your life is to be complete and lacking nothing when you get to the other side. But notice that you have to allow it. Let your perseverance in the storm have its full effect.

The time to prepare for the storm is before the first feeder band takes your breath away. Christians are not uniquely protected from adversity and pain...the life of faith is not a wrinkle free one. It is rather a life long learning process where we understand that we are never beyond the careful watch of Jesus, we will remain in the storm until we get to the end of ourselves and cry out to Jesus from the depths of our surrender, and not storm is brought upon us without a transformative lesson to be learned in the process. God never wastes pain.

So when the storm comes and it will...Rather than asking why me or how do I fix it? Prepare today to thank God for the opportunity to demonstrate your faith in Him to others and yourself .Commit to complete surrender and know that your help comes only from the Lord. It is in our weakness that we begin to understand His strength.

Consider it joy my brothers and sisters...Let's pray.