

Asleep in a Storm

September 30th, 2012

Luke 8:22-25

"²²One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they set out, ²³and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. ²⁴And they went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. ²⁵He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?""

One of the challenging things about preaching regularly is the knowledge that on any given Sunday, people walk into this room so beaten up by this world, so overcome by the storms and challenges and heartaches of life, that it is almost impossible for them to hear what I am saying. Maybe you've come here this morning in that kind of place: it may be a financial storm, or a relational storm, or a medical storm, or a vocational storm. You're so discouraged, so tired, so scared, that it's hard for you to even listen to me.

This text is great medicine for the soul for a person in that predicament (and if you're not there now, you will be one day). In his commentary on Luke, Darrell Bock bridges the gap between this 2000 year-old story and your present-day struggle to rest and believe in the all-powerful care of Jesus Christ:

In bridging contexts, our sense of helplessness need not be limited to finding ourselves at risk in settings of nature. The storms of today can arrive in a rush of circumstances beyond our control. The point of connection is not in the precise situation the disciples face in the boat, but in the feelings of helplessness they have about where Jesus has led them.

If you've tried to live the life of faith for any period of time, you've felt that, haven't you? Everything is going wrong, you're sinking, and God seems to be asleep at the wheel, unaware of or indifferent to your pain. This passage is tailor-made to strengthen and sustain you for just that kind of predicament. So let's behold our God this morning, and

consider what this text teaches us about the power, perplexity and purpose of Jesus.

The Power of Jesus

The power of Jesus is visible in the way He speaks to the storm (don't fail to marvel at that: Jesus *speaks* to the storm!). A windstorm (a fierce gale of wind, hurricane-like in its intensity) has come down on the lake, and it must have been a really bad one of the disciples -- savvy, experienced fishermen that they were -- were in a panic that they were going to die. And Luke tells us, "²⁴He awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm." Jesus commands a hurricane the way you or I might shush an unruly child -- "Quiet, be still!" (Mark 4:39) -- and the hurricane obeys like a compliant child. That is awesome power!

It is none other than divine power, and the disciples know it: "²⁵And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?"

This is not a question in search of information. They knew who commands the winds and the water. Maybe the words of Psalm 107 came to mind: "²⁸Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. ²⁹He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed."

The upshot of this story is this: Jesus Christ is no ordinary man; He is God almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, Lord of all. As Paul would write in Colossians 1:

"¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

And you've heard me do this before, but let's not forget about the scope of all things. The farthest thing ever measured is 13 billion light years away from us (*one* light year is 5.88 trillion miles). In the midst of all that, a little galaxy called the Milky Way exists (about the size of a peanut in this big room), with hundreds of billions of stars. One of those stars is our sun (a speck on that peanut), which rotates around the center of the Milky Way every 250 million years. One of the planets circling the sun is Earth. This moment, Jesus Christ is upholding it all with His omnipotent word. How immense is Jesus!

Like I said, I know you've heard all this before, but I don't believe you're hearing this too much. Diane Sawyer will not sign off World News Tonight by saying, "Remember, Jesus Christ is Lord and Ruler of all things." The magazine rack at ShopRite will not feature a cover story on how Jesus Christ offers greater glory and satisfaction than those digitally enhanced super-models could ever provide. Bob Costas will not close out tonight's Eagles game by reminding his audience, "Though you've seen some impressive action tonight, let's not forget that Jesus Christ is even now upholding Lincoln Financial Field and everything in it by His all-powerful world!"

This Christ-neglect is so pervasive that it can't help but affect the way you interact with the storms of this life. I don't know the storm you're walking through today, but Christians, I plead with you to look more at the size of your Savior than the size of the storm! Meditate on His glorious power, which He exercises for the good of those who wait on Him. A lot of times we walk through storms like functional atheists, rather than fixing the eyes of our hearts on the One who silences storms with His almighty word.

The Perplexity of Jesus

As stunning and marvelous as the power of Jesus is, there is something perplexing about Him that we find in this passage as well. What's

perplexing (at least to me) is that Jesus -- with all this amazing, universe-controlling power at His disposal -- leads the disciples into a storm. Getting in the boat and crossing to the other side is Jesus' idea (v.22), and then as the storm makes its way towards the unsuspecting disciples, Jesus takes a nap.

Now I have no doubt that Jesus, with the demands on Him and the constant teaching and doing battle with Satan, was really tired. The incarnation is a glorious mystery, that the infinite, all-powerful Lord of all took on flesh and blood and subjected Himself to the weaknesses and frailties of living in a human body. But what perplexes me is that Jesus obviously has power to silence the storm with a simple command, and if He has that kind of power then I think it's a safe assumption to say that He could have prevented the storm from coming upon them in the first place. And He didn't. That's what I find perplexing.

His disciples are fearing for their lives, their boat is being swamped with water (can you put yourself in those shoes?), and Jesus is sleeping in the storm! What kind of Savior is that?! It makes me think of Psalm 44, "²³Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever! ²⁴Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?" Haven't you found yourself in that place from time to time, sinking, pleading for help, and it just seems like God has vanished. You're not the first person to experience that. Jesus will allow the storm to come, He'll maybe allow the storm to remain longer than you think it should, He won't be hurried.

Get this lesson: if you think that coming to Jesus and giving your life to Him means everything is going to go smoothly for you, you're mistaken. Jesus Christ, the Lord of the storm, will allow waves and winds to come into your life. Now that can be very perplexing, but if we think about it, if Jesus is big enough and great enough to calm the storm with one little word, then He's also big enough and great enough to have reasons for the storm that you can't get your mind around,

right? If we're thinking rightly about the infinite greatness of Jesus, it shouldn't perplex us that sometimes things perplex us. It's logical that the Lord of the universe might act some ways that seem illogical to us.

Jesus is Lord of the universe, and He's the good shepherd. I heard Elisabeth Elliot tell a story of watching sheep being put into a vat of insecticide; if they weren't put into that vat every couple of months, they'd be eaten up by insects and die. And she watched the shepherd struggling to put them in there, burying their heads in the vat, and the sheep making things more difficult, kicking and screaming, why?

The sheep couldn't see the big picture, they couldn't understand. The shepherd is a higher order of being and knows better than they do what they need. And Jesus is the good shepherd. He may have purposes for your storm that you just can't understand, no matter how hard you try.

The Purpose of Jesus

In His mercy, God has not left us in the dark about what some of those purposes are. And I close by pointing you to one of them that is alluded to here in our text, and then I'll confirm that with another passage of Scripture. After being awakened and silencing the storm with His almighty word, Jesus turned to His disciples and said, "²⁵Where is your faith?" In the raging storm, Jesus was looking for faith. He was testing, refining and purifying the faith of His disciples in a way that never could have happened if the calm of the sea had not been interrupted by the God-appointed storm.

As strange as it may seem, one of the primary reasons that God shakes us through suffering is to make our faith more unshakable. John Piper says that faith is like muscle tissue: if you stress it to the limit, it gets stronger. When your faith is threatened and tested and stretched to the breaking point, the result is a greater capacity to endure. It's likely that Peter was on this boat in the raging storm, and years later he wrote:

"⁶In this (their glorious coming salvation, kept in heaven for them, secured by Christ's resurrection from the dead) you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so 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."

When gold is melted in fire the impurities float to the top and can be removed, so that when the refining is over, the gold is even more valuable. And Peter -- having learned from Jesus -- says that faith is like that. You have faith, but there are impurities in it. Your heart is prone to wander. Your soul is prone to shifting its hope and confidence off of Christ and onto money or family or popularity. Our faith is mingled with murmuring, ingratitude and self-reliance.

So in love, God aims to refine our faith through the fires of varied trials, distresses and storms. He so values faith (more precious than gold!) that He will pry open your hands and take away everything else in the world that you might be tempted to rely on, so that you will grow more confident and sure that He is all you need.

Looking Back for the Sake of the Future

Jesus is God, and Jesus is enough. Those are lessons we learn from this storm on the sea. Faith in Jesus will not make you immune from the storms of life, but the storms of life are designed by God to cleanse your faith from the dross of hoping in anything smaller than Him to give you the security, significance, comfort and value that you crave.

And you actually have far greater resources to trust Jesus than the disciples did in that boat on the Sea of Galilee. We see in Mark's account what their faith struggle was: "³⁸Teacher, *do you not care* that we are perishing?" How do you trust in the care of Jesus, especially when everything around you is shaking and it look like He's asleep?

You lay hold by faith of what the disciples hadn't yet seen: Jesus enduring a great storm on your behalf. "¹⁹Behold, the storm of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked." There was a storm that Jesus endured 2,000 years ago, greater, more terrifying and painful than anything you'll ever go through. When the Jesus came in flesh and blood and subjected Himself to the weakness and frailty of a human body, it wasn't just so that He could experience fatigue; it was to experience death.

On the cross, the whirling tempest of God's wrath burst on Jesus, though He had done no wickedness. He gave Himself up for our wickedness, so that by trusting in Him, we'd never need to endure that terrifying storm. God shows His great love/care for us, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. So no matter what perplexities you may find as you walk the walk of faith, you can know for certain that whatever storm you may be in, it's *not* because God doesn't care for you. The death of Jesus guarantees that.

As untamable as the storm may seem, the love of Jesus is more untamable than any earthly trial you may be called to endure for Jesus' sake. Faith looks back on Jesus' great love shown in His life, death and resurrection, and concludes: if Jesus stayed true to me by withstanding that storm for my sake, I can (by His grace) stay true to Him during my storm. Or, in the triumphant words of the apostle Paul:

"³⁸For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."