

The Night Of Tempest

Matthew 14:22-33

Pastor John Miller

Starting in Matthew 14:22, Matthew says, “Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away.” So Jesus is with His disciples at the Sea of Galilee. He wants them to get in the boat, and He sends them across the lake.

“And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.” There’s our tempest. “Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.’”

“And Peter answered Him and said, ‘Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.’ So He said, ‘Come.’ And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’ And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’ And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God.’”

As I was preparing this message, it reminded me that about 15 years ago, I was going to go out on the ocean and spend three nights on a small boat. I had been on boats on the ocean before, but this was going to be a surf/fish off the boat experience. I don’t fish but I do like to surf, so I was going to surf off the boat, and my friends were going to fish. There were four of us, and we had this 25-foot boat that we launched out of the harbor in Santa Barbara, and we headed north to the Channel Islands. We surfed out there then went to the mainland at Point Conception and surfed there. The first night we anchored at Point Conception. And it was beautiful. The sun was setting, the wind was calm and the sea was smooth and glassy. We struck up the barbecue and barbecued the fish and lobster we caught. It was going to be very cool sleeping on the boat on a four-day surf trip around the Channel Islands.

Now this was my first experience sleeping on a boat on the ocean. I went to bed that night, and the sea was perfectly calm and glassy. Then about three hours into the night—wham!—the storm came. The rest of the night the boat bounced and tossed. The waves slapped the boat. I was down in the bow and got knocked around. It was the most miserable night I’ve ever spent!

Isn’t it amazing how life can go from smooth to rough in just an instant. Everything’s fine, your marriage is good, everybody’s happy, making good money, got a good job—life is good. And all of a sudden—wham! Storms come into your life. It’s been said that into every life storms must come.

You might be in a storm right now. Maybe it's financial, emotional, a marital problem, psychological or spiritual. Maybe it's a physical problem; you've been diagnosed with or you're sick with some disease. But I believe that when we go through the storms of life, we can trust the Lord to be with us and to deliver us.

Now the storm in this story has spiritual implications that will teach us how to face the storms in our lives. This is a life-application sermon. The night scene of the disciples on the Sea of Galilee reminds us of five assurances we need to hang onto as anchors for the soul whenever we pass through a storm and are buffeted by the winds or a tempest.

The first anchor for your soul is His providence. He brought me here. Verse 22 says, "Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat." In my experience, I was actually in a small boat and not a ship. It was probably only about 15 feet long and 5 feet wide, more like a wooden rowboat. The disciples were out on the lake or Sea of Galilee. Jesus constrained them to "go before Him to the other side." So the Bible is clear that He didn't say, "Go out and drown" or "Go out and sink." He wanted them to go to the other side of the lake, "while He sent the multitudes away."

Now in verse 22 we see that Jesus "constrained," His disciples, as the King James version says. The word "constrained" means that He forced them into the boat. Maybe they really didn't want to go.

Have you ever tried to get a two-year-old into a car seat when they didn't want to get into a car seat? They're fighting against you, and you're wrestling with them. You're leaving Disneyland and they don't want to go.

So I imagine Jesus saying, "Get in the boat, you disciples! Cross to the other side! I'll meet you over there."

"We don't want to go!"

"You have to go! Get in the boat!" So He gets them in the boat on this night ride on the Sea of Galilee.

Now the question is, why did Jesus constrain, force or order His disciples into the boat? That would mean they would encounter a storm at midnight. Number one, He wanted to spend some time alone in prayer. Verse 23 says, "When He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there." So Jesus wanted time alone.

Have you ever just wanted time alone? Like you just wanted some peace and quiet.

This week I spent a day all alone with the Lord at the beach. That was so refreshing to my soul. Just to spend a day with me and Jesus, fellowshiping with Him. I encourage you to do the same. Find a place alone and talk to God. As Jesus prayed up on the mountain, we also

need time alone with God to pray, so we can be prepared for the storms that will come.

The second reason Jesus wanted them to get in the boat was for their protection. He wanted to protect them from the movement that would make Him king. Notice that Jesus said, "He sent the multitudes away," in verse 22.

Who are "the multitudes"? Verses 20-21 say, "So they all ate and were filled..."—the word is "glutted"—"...and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children." This is the end of the story where Jesus fed the 5,000 men, not counting women and children. So there were thousands of people. And with just a few loaves and fish, Jesus blessed it, broke it and fed them all until they were filled. Then they took up the leftovers, 12 baskets full. So this is the multitude that Jesus was protecting His disciples from.

You ask, "What was He protecting them from?" In the Gospel of John's account of this event, in chapter 6, verse 15, it says that the crowd wanted to make Jesus king. So Jesus knew that was a danger to Him and to His disciples. That wasn't God's will. God's will was for Jesus to go to the Cross and die for the sins of the world. Then He would come back in His Second Coming as king and establish His kingdom. He came the first time to suffer and die. And the disciples were in danger of getting caught up in the hoopla and excitement of this movement.

"We want Jesus to be king! Let's make Him king! He feeds us." Any politician who says he'll feed us, we give him our vote. "Let's make Jesus king! He fed us lunch. We want Him to be our king. He fed us bread and fish."

So Jesus was actually protecting His disciples from the influence of the crowd. He knew they were safer in the storm in the will of God than on land out of the will of God in the crowd. The safest place for you to be is in the will of God, even if it's in a storm. Jesus sent them out on the lake into a storm, but He had a purpose and a plan in that storm. Jesus purposefully sent them across the lake into a storm, because He had a purpose and design. That was His providential plan. Jesus sent them out into the storm for their protection, and this is many times why God sends storms to us. He wants to protect us.

You ask, "Well, how does that protect us?" In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul said that God allowed him to have "a thorn in his flesh...a messenger of Satan." Why would God do that? Paul said, "...lest I be exalted above measure." God allowed Satan to buffet Paul in order to keep Paul humble. That's a good thing. A thorn in the flesh is a bad thing, but its product in this life was good: it saved him from pride. It kept him humble, which kept him useable. God wants us to be humble and dependent upon Him, so He'll let suffering come into our lives to show us our weakness, our limited resources and our lack of wisdom.

Ironically, the disciples were in the midnight storm, because they obeyed Jesus.

Have you ever been on a camping trip and everything goes wrong? It starts to rain, the tent starts to leak, the wind blows and then the tent falls over. Then you look at the guys you're with

on the trip and say, "Whose idea was this? We have to blame this on somebody!"

Can you imagine the disciples out on the boat and the wind starts to blow and the boat starts to sink? They're toiling at night and someone says, "Whose idea was this midnight boat ride?!"

"Don't look at me! It was Jesus' idea."

"Where is He?"

"He's up on the mountain praying."

So it was Jesus' idea and He's not even on the trip! He's up on the mountain praying, but we're going to see that He was praying for them in the midst of the storm. But they were out on the lake for their protection, on purpose, to keep them humble and dependent on Him.

A second reason God lets the storms come into our lives by His providence is for His perfection in our lives. It's for God to mature us. The reason God lets suffering come into your life is to perfect you. That doesn't mean that you'll never sin and be perfect. The word "perfect" in the New Testament means "to mature." For God to grow us and to mature us, He has to allow storms to come into our lives. Jesus wanted them to grow in their faith and in the knowledge of who He is.

And Jesus wants to grow you in the knowledge of who He is. Some of the greatest times of growth in my life haven't been just when I've been studying the Word but when I'm going through suffering. I'm learning the Word as I trust in Him and suffer the storms of life. It causes me to grow stronger in my faith.

A third reason the disciples encountered the storm—and we do, as well—is for His correction. Three reasons God allows, in His providential care, the storms of life are for His protection—to keep us from sin and to keep us humble; for His perfection—to keep us growing to maturity in our walk with Him; and for our correction. What that means is that many times we drift away from God, so God will chasten us. We use the word "spank," but that's kind of an offensive word in our culture today. Yet God sometimes spans His children lovingly, purposefully and intentionally so that He can grow us and mature us. It's called "chastening."

In Hebrews 12:11, it says, "No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" or yielded to God's program. So we don't fight the Lord; we yield to Him. His discipline will be to correct us when we have sinned.

The story of Jonah is a great example of this. He was in a boat on the sea at night. He was thrown overboard. He was supposed to go to Nineveh, but instead he went down to Joppa and got on a boat headed for Tarsus, the opposite direction from Nineveh. He was out of the will of God, so God sent the storm to correct him and direct him back to Nineveh to preach the Gospel. The others on the boat threw him overboard, and God had a whale swallow Jonah.

One of the many reasons I believe this story is because Jesus believed it. Jesus said that “As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Jesus believed in Jonah, so I believe in Jonah. I believe that the Bible is historically true and accurate.

So Jonah was in the belly of this fish for three days and three nights. And he was so stubborn and obstinate that he was there for three days. The minute I had slid down that whale’s throat, I would have said, “God, save me! I’m sorry! I’ll go to Nineveh. Get me out of here!” But Jonah just kind of stewed down there for three days. Then Jonah finally said, “Okay, God; I’ll go to Nineveh! I will preach to the Ninevites. Just let me out!” So God had the whale barf him up onto the beach. So Jonah was in the storm because he needed correcting.

Do you know that God might have had me preach this sermon for you? He may want you to know that what you are going through is to correct you and to get you back onto the right path, because you’re going the wrong way. If so, repent and turn back toward and get right with God. Don’t keep going the wrong direction. Let that storm wake you up to your need for God in your life.

So there are protection storms, perfection storms and correction storms. Remember God’s providence; He brought you here. You’re here by His design and purpose. God controls all our circumstances in life. Sometimes when annoying, little things go wrong in your day, you should stop and ask, “Lord, what are you trying to teach me? What are you trying to show me?”

So first, we have His providential care—He brought me here. The second anchor for your soul is His prayers. He sees, He knows, He is praying for me. Verses 23-24 say, “And when He had sent the multitudes away...”—there’s the 5,000—“...He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray.” That’s His prayer. “Now when evening came...”—here’s our nighttime scene—“...He was alone there. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.”

In Mark 6:48, there is a parallel account. The Bible says that from the mountain, “He saw them straining at rowing.” Jesus looked down from the mountain, at night, and saw them toiling on the sea.

You ask, “How would Jesus see them from the mountain in the dead of night toiling on the sea?”

The first night I ever spent at the Sea of Galilee on one of our trips, I saw a full moon as I looked over the water. It was a beautiful night with the moonlight shining on the water all the way across the lake. As people passed by at night on the lake, they were silhouetted against the moonlight.

The Sea of Galilee is eight miles across, so even in the midst of the sea, four miles out, Jesus could see them, no doubt, in the moonlight. He didn’t need his divine omniscience; He could see by His own natural eye that they were struggling. So I believe then that Jesus began to pray for them. How marvelous.

The Bible tells us that Jesus is praying for us. Romans 8:34 says that Jesus, “who is even at the right hand of God...also makes intercession for us.” So Jesus sees us, He knows us and He hasn’t forgotten us. The natural response to a storm is to say, “God, where are You?! God, have You forgotten me?! God, do You know what’s going on?!” We need to realize that He sees, He knows and He’s praying.

In Matthew 6:26, it says that Jesus feeds the birds. He takes care of them. “Are you not of more value than they?” Matthew 10:31 says, “You are of more value than many sparrows.” So you need to remember that your Father in heaven will take care of you.

So I believe Jesus was praying for Himself to do the Father’s will, He was praying for the disciples, that they would be strengthened and helped and today He prays for us.

We learn that whatever is hidden from us is not hidden from God. This is something that we forget. We look ahead and are encouraged by the hope of heaven. We should do that. We look back and remember Calvary where Jesus died for our sins. We’re encouraged by that. But we also need to look up and remember that Jesus is in heaven, and He sees me, He knows me and He’s praying for me. So when you think that no one knows, no one cares and no one’s praying for you in your storm, Jesus is.

Remember when Jesus turned to Peter and said, “Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat”? Can you imagine the Lord turning to you and saying, “Satan called me last night. He asked for you by name”?

“What did you tell him, Lord?! You told him ‘No’; right?”

But Jesus told Peter, “I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.” So Jesus was praying for Peter. Though Peter fell and denied the Lord, he was restored and went on to a life of service with Jesus Christ. So we have Jesus’ prayers for us.

So we have His providential care—He brought me here; we have His prayers—He’s praying for me; and the third anchor for your soul is that when we’re in a storm and are buffeted by the waves, He will come to me, verse 25. “Now in the fourth watch of the night...” That’s 3:00 to 6:00 a.m. The Romans divided the night into four watches. I’m fast asleep at that time. And it’s darkest before the dawn.

Verse 25 continues, “Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.” This is a miracle; it indicates His divine sovereignty over nature. Jesus is the Son of God. Verse 26, “And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled...”—or “freaked out”—“...saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out for fear.”

When we are afraid, it’s an evident sign that we’re not trusting God. Verse 27, “But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘Be of good cheer!’” Or literally “Take courage.” He said, “It is I.” Or you can use the words “I AM.” “Do not be afraid.”

In another parallel account, in Mark 6, when Jesus came walking on the sea, the Bible says—and it's almost humorous—in verse 48 that He made it as though He was going to walk right by them. That makes me laugh.

It was not easy being a disciple. He sends you out in the boat, at night, in a storm, and then He shows up to freak you out.

Don't you hate when somebody scares you for a joke and they think it's funny? You want to punch them!

Jesus shows up and seems like He's going to go right by them as if saying, "Hey, guys. What's up?" They freaked out.

These facts about Jesus coming to the disciples are interesting. Number one, He came during the darkest hour of the night, at the fourth watch. Man's extremity is God's opportunity. Often God will let you exhaust your strength, your resources, your intellect and completely come to the end of yourself before He shows up. It's the best place you could ever come to; to hit bottom so that you will look up. Come to the end of yourself so you'll say, "Jesus, I need You! Jesus, help me!" So Jesus actually came at the darkest hour of the night.

And in this passage, there are three times it says "immediately." God's timing is perfect. If it was now the fourth watch and they had been sent out before sunset, they had been in the storm, rowing against the wind and waves for eight hours. And that is a big body of water to be on, eight miles wide and thirteen miles long. And if I went down in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, I wouldn't be able to swim four miles to safety in the storm. So they were freaking out.

God many times allows us to come to the end of our rope. You tried to fix your marriage, tried to work out your problems, but you come to the end of yourself and say, "I need God. Why didn't I come to Him sooner and trust in Him?!"

Notice, secondly, about Jesus' coming to His disciples, in verse 26, He came to them in the storm. The wind and waves were contrary. Yet the wind and the waves, which the disciples feared, was the very path that was bringing Jesus to them.

Do you know that you meet the Lord in the storms of life? God speaks in the storms more than in the calm.

Thirdly, He spoke to them, verse 27. "Immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'Be of good cheer! It is I.'" And when He used that phrase "It is I," He used the phrase "Ego Eimai" or the great I AM. That's the same name that God gave Himself when he spoke to Moses. He told Moses, "You shall say 'I AM has sent me to you.'" It's a claim to be Jehovah or Yahweh. He's claiming to be God. So He says, "I AM."

He also said, "Do not be afraid." God can take away your fears right now. Your fear of death, your fear of sorrows and suffering—all your phobias and fears. Jesus is the answer. He can

actually help you to live a life free of fear. A little faith can bring your soul to heaven by trusting Christ, but a lot of faith will bring heaven to your soul right now in the storms of life. So we need to grow in our faith. He is telling them that He will be with them, so “Do not be afraid.” We have His presence.

Psalms 139:7-12 says, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall fall on me,’ even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You.” So whether it’s darkness or distance, God is with you. You may not sense Him, but He has promised “never to leave you nor forsake you.” Isaiah 43:2 says, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.” So we have His presence. He comes to us.

The fourth anchor for our souls in a storm is His purpose. He will help me to grow through that time. Verses 28-31 say, “And Peter answered Him and said, ‘Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.’” The other disciples are thinking, What in the world are you doing, Peter?! This could be a ghost! You’re talking to a ghost asking it to call you out on the water! Peter evidently sensed, when he heard the Lord’s voice, it was Jesus.

And this is what the Lord does to us: He speaks to us through His Word. When you’re going through a storm, you hear His voice clearly in the Word.

Then Peter said in faith, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water. So He said, ‘Come.’ And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying...”—here’s his prayer—“...‘Lord, save me!’ And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’”

This is one of our favorite stories in the Bible. We all know the story of Jesus walking on the water and Peter getting out of the boat and walking on the water to Jesus. It’s a miracle and I believe it happened.

In ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, the symbol for the impossible was two feet on top of water. So this is an impossible situation; you cannot walk on water. But God can do the impossible. And He can enable you to do what seems to be impossible.

The lesson on Peter is that he stepped out in faith. A lot of preachers like to bash Peter. “Oh, Peter, why’d you get out of the boat?! Why’d you look at the waves?! Why’d you sink?! Oh, you, Peter, of little faith.” But nobody else was stepping out of the boat. I commend Peter. I think a lot of preachers are going to have Peter looking for them when they get to heaven. “Hey dude. I want to talk to you about that sermon you gave about me. You really came down on me.” I don’t want Peter to get mad at me. I’m not going to get down on Peter.

It took faith to step out of that boat. Faith in that he heard Jesus' voice—we hear God in His Word; we obey His command—we become “doers of the Word”; and he set his eyes on Jesus—he walked on the water.

But then in verse 30, Peter's faith began to falter. Often ours does, as well. When Peter looked at the wind and the waves that were boisterous, he became fearful and began to sink. This is a simple message we often forget but bears repeating: don't take your eyes off Jesus and look at the circumstances. Always keep your eyes on Jesus. You look at your problems, your weaknesses, your bank account, your wallet and you get depressed. You look in the mirror and get depressed. You look at your husband, your wife or your kids. When your kids are little they can step on your feet, but when they get older, they can step on your heart. There are a lot of things that will bum you out. Life is not easy; it's difficult.

So we have to get our eyes off the circumstances; don't look at the waves, the wind, the darkness of the night. “I can't see Him. I don't feel Him.” Just look at Jesus right in front of you. It's so very important. Peter began to walk on the water, but when he took his eyes off of Jesus, he began to sink.

You might be sinking right now in despair. It's because of one simple reason: you're not looking to Jesus. You're not fixing your eyes upon Him. He's “the author and finisher of our faith.”

So Peter began to sink, and I've often wondered how deep did he go before he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Was he at his waist? Was he flailing? Was he to his neck or to his chin? Was the water right to the bottom of his lip? Did he have only one hand above the water and he was flailing before Jesus reached out and caught him? I don't know. And we need to cry out to God before we sink.

But the point I want to make is that Jesus didn't rebuke Peter for getting out of the boat. He didn't rebuke Peter for walking on water. He rebuked Peter for his lack of faith. “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

But I like Peter's prayer. It is so sincere, so heartfelt, so genuine. He didn't take the time when he was sinking under the waves to say, “Our Father, who art in heaven....” If he prayed that prayer, by the time he would have gotten to “Lead us not into temptation,” he would have been at the bottom of the sea. Nor did he say, “In Jesus' Name....” He just said, “Lord, save me!” It was a prayer of faith. It was of a little faith but it was enough. So Peter's rescued.

And what happens to Peter is the same thing that happens to us: he grew in his faith. The only way to grow your faith is to exercise it. The only way to exercise it is in a storm, in trouble, in a trial. So we have to look to Jesus, we have to call on His name and then He reaches out His hand and delivers us and helps us grow.

The fifth anchor for our souls in a storm is His power. He will see me through. Not only will He help me grow, but He'll see me through the storm. Verses 32-33 say, “And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.” That was a miracle. “Then those who were in the boat came and

worshiped Him, saying, 'Truly You are the Son of God.'"

So all these miracles took place: Jesus walked on water, Peter walked on water and the minute Jesus got into the boat with Peter, "the wind ceased." Then in John 6:21, it says, "Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going." Then the disciples' eyes were immediately opened and they knew who Jesus was, verse 33.

The point is, when you are going through a storm, Jesus will reveal Himself like never before. You will worship Him as you experience His power and His strength in your life. You have His power as well as His presence.

Notice these things in verse 33: they "worshipped Him" and they confessed Him. They said, "Truly You are the Son of God." The first time in the Gospel story where the disciples were said to worship Jesus was here in this verse. Others had worshipped Him, but this is the first time the disciples worshipped Him.

It's interesting that earlier in Jesus' ministry with His disciples in Matthew 8 and Mark 4, Jesus was with them in the boat—this is another episode on the sea at night—and a storm came. This was when they woke Him up. He was sleeping on a pillow, so I travel with a pillow, too. It's Biblical. Jesus was asleep; I take naps. Jesus did it.

So the waves were cashing over the boat, the wind was blowing and the disciples woke Jesus up. They asked Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" Jesus replied, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Jesus looked at the wind and waves and said, "Peace, be still!" Literally, He said, "Be muzzled!" The wind and waves stopped and there was a great calm.

Earlier the disciples had said, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" Now when He comes walking on the water in the storm and Peter walks on the water and they get back in the boat, they say, "Truly You are the Son of God." So the whole purpose of this story is for them to know that Jesus is God and for them to grow in faith.

God wants you to know who He is and to grow in your faith. "Truly You are the Son of God." So there were two first times in this story: this was the first time they worshipped Him and the first time they confessed Him. They grew in their faith, even as Peter grew in his faith when he walked on the water.

In Psalm 46:10, the psalmist says, "Be still, and know that I am..."—there's the word again, Ego Eimai, or I AM—"...God." The words "Be still, and know" mean "Take your hands off." Take your hands off the problem, fix your eyes on Jesus Christ and know that He is God.

So there are five anchors for the storms of life: number one, His providence—He brought me here; number two, His prayers—He's praying for me; number three, His presence—He'll come to me in the storms of life; number four, His purpose—He'll help me grow and mature; and

number five, His power—He will see me through.

“He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” So let's trust Him.