

Storm Theology

Luke 8:22-25

Pastor John Miller

Our story says, in Luke 8:22-25, “Now it happened, on a certain day, that He got into a boat...” actually a large sailboat “...with His disciples. And He said to them, ‘Let us cross over to the other side of the lake.’” This statement is going to be one of the keys to this story. “And they launched out. But as they sailed He fell asleep. And a windstorm...” or “tornado” or “hurricane” in the Greek “...came down on the lake, and they were filling with water, and were in jeopardy.” They were in danger of drowning. “And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, ‘Master, Master, we are perishing!’ Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm. But He said to them, ‘Where is your faith?’ And they were afraid, and marveled, saying to one another, ‘Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!’”

In our study of the Gospel of Luke we come to one of the most beloved stories in the life of Christ. What little child growing up in Sunday school doesn’t love the story of Jesus asleep in the boat, awakened by His troubled disciples, standing up and rebuking the wind and waves and immediately there was a great calm. Then the disciples wondered what manner of man Jesus was that He had control over the wind and waves.

It is in Matthew 8, in Mark 4 and in Luke 8. In Luke we move from the words of Jesus speaking parables—we heard the parable of the sower and the seed—to the works of Jesus revealing His power. So we go from parables to His power. It’s one thing to speak wise words; it’s another to back them up with wonderful works. So not only did Jesus speak like no other man (John 7:46), He did works and miracles like no other individual. In this text, we see Jesus’ power over the wind and the waves.

I like the ocean. I don’t surf like I used to, but I used to surf quite a bit. I like the waves and the power of the ocean. Whenever I’m out on the ocean, I’m thinking about the Lord being the master of the waves and the wind. There are beautiful psalms about Him bringing up the waves and down the waves and bringing the waves to a calm. So Jesus uses His power over nature to bring the calm.

In the remaining verses of Luke 8 we will see Christ’s power over demons, in the demoniac of Gadara; over disease, in the woman with the issue of blood; and over death, in the healing of Jairus’ daughter. So Jesus has power over nature—power over demons, over disease and over death.

I have titled this message “Storm Theology,” because in the story we have revealed Christ’s person and power. God reveals to us His nature, His power and His love in the storms of our lives.

before the storm, during the storm and after the storm.

First, we will look at before the storm, which is in verse 22 to the first part of verse 23. “Now it happened, on a certain day, that He got into a boat with His disciples. And He said to them, ‘Let us cross over to the other side of the lake.’” This is the lake Galilee, commonly called “the Sea of Galilee.” “And they launched out. But as they sailed He fell asleep.” I like that; I’m so blessed to know that Jesus liked to nap. So Jesus is asleep in the boat.

I was talking to my little granddaughter the other day, and I asked, “Don’t you like to take naps?”

She said, “No; I hate naps!” I love naps.

Let’s break this section down. It says, in verse 22, “Now it happened, on a certain day....” In Mark 4:35, it says, “On the same day, when evening had come....” So this is actually the same day that Jesus had been speaking the parable of the sower and the seed. At the end of the day, in later afternoon, is when He got in the boat with His disciples—He had sent the multitude away—and launched out onto lake Galilee to cross it. “He got into a boat” or “ship.”

Remember that Jesus had been preaching the parable about the sower and the seed from a boat. Now Jesus got into a larger boat. The Greek word used for this boat describes a larger boat that had a sail and could hold about 20 people. Mark’s Gospel also says that He sent the multitude away and took only His disciples in this boat into the storm.

Verse 22 says, and this is key, “Let us cross over to the other side of the lake. And they launched out.” He didn’t say they would be “going under.”

And verse 23, “But as they sailed He fell asleep.” You may ask, “What is the big deal with Jesus sleeping?” There is a lot of theology in this story, and we begin with what is known as the Incarnation, the true humanity of Jesus. This is one of many clear indications that Jesus was truly a man—a sinless man, but truly a man: Christ was sleeping.

Mark 4:38 says that “He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow.” I like that. Why? When I was younger, I traveled a lot around the world doing ministry. I used to have a little, goose-down pillow. And the pillow got so beaten down that if you flattened it out, it was only about half-an-inch thick. I loved that pillow. I miss that pillow. It was so thin and flexible that if I put it over my arm, it would drape down like a towel. I would fold it up and it would fit in my briefcase. I used to travel with a pillow in my briefcase. My friends thought I was crazy. Then I would make a little ball the size and thickness I wanted to sleep on. But everywhere I went, I slept perfectly. I had that pillow for many years until my wife threw it away. She thought it was diseased and full of fungus. I cried. I wept.

So I always liked this verse, because Jesus and I both traveled with our pillows. We could sleep anywhere at any time. So Jesus was at the stern of the boat asleep on a pillow. Other translations say “a pad.” I reject that; I like “pillow.”

So what this speaks to us of is that Christ was truly human; He was truly a man. And how did Jesus become a man? It’s called the Incarnation. The word “incarnate” is Latin for “becoming

flesh.” So Jesus became flesh through the virgin birth. Mary was a virgin, the Holy Spirit came upon her and there was conception in her womb. So Jesus was God and man in one person. It’s called “the hypostatic union”; fully God and fully man in one person, Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:6-7 says, “Being in the form...” which is “morphe” or “essence” “...of God, [Jesus] did not consider it robbery to be equal with God...” or “not something to hold onto” “...but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.” Jesus emptied Himself of the display of His majesty and glory—not of his deity. So Jesus is God and man in one person. He is the God-man.

Jesus was fully human, so He slept, He wept (John 11:35), He got tired (John 4:6), He was hungry (Matthew 4:11) and He was thirsty (John 19:28). Jesus was truly a man. That’s so important. Why? So He could redeem us, so He could die on the Cross and so He could reign on the throne of David.

In our text, the point about His humanity is that He became our compassionate High Priest. Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” So Jesus is our compassionate, sympathetic, caring High Priest.

When you are tired, Jesus understands. When you are sad and weep, Jesus understands; He wept. It’s interesting that, in John 11:35 when Jesus was at the grave of Lazarus, it says, “Jesus wept.” That’s the shortest verse in the English Bible. It means that His eyes moistened and a tear trickled down His face. There is a different Greek word for “weeping” which means “sobbing” or “weeping convulsively out loud.” So we read about the Son of God in tears. He was thirsty, He was tired, He was weary, He slept and He was hungry.

Someone said,

“In every pain that rends the heart,

The Man of Sorrows has a part.”

So His humanity means He is sympathetic and compassionate as our High Priest.

What a beautiful picture in the first part of verse 23. They are in the boat with Jesus sailing across the lake. This is a picture of the Christian life—sailing with Jesus. But life is not always smooth sailing. Storms do come into every life. We love the smooth sailing. We love it when the wind is at our back, the road is slightly downhill, all the obstacles are removed and everyone lining the path is clapping for us. There are rose bushes along the road with their fragrance but have their thorns removed. Praise Jesus!

But storms do come. Even Christians, even believers in Jesus encounter the storms of life. If you’ve been taught as a Christians that your life will be without trouble, trial or tribulation, you haven’t been properly taught the Word of God. Jesus said, “In the world you will have

tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

So this is before the storm comes, they're in the boat in the late afternoon and they had smooth sailing.

I remember the first time I spent a couple of days on a 25-foot boat. We were doing a little surfing and fishing out of the Channel Islands. We anchored that first night, the wind was offshore, it was a glassy sea, the moon was out and we were barbecuing steaks out on the deck. It was just perfect—until midnight. A storm came. We couldn't sleep that night on the boat in the midst of the storm.

Now we move from before the storm to during the storm, verses 23-24. All of us are either going into a storm, are in a storm or have just come out of a storm. "And a windstorm..." on par with a hurricane "...came down on the lake..." that is, "Lake Galilee" "...and they were filling with water..." the water splashing over the sides of the boat "...and were in jeopardy. And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm."

In Matthew 8:24, it says, "And suddenly a great..." which is the word "mega" "...tempest..." from which we get our word "seismograph" from the Greek word "seismos" "...arose on the sea."

You need to understand the geography of the Sea of Galilee. It is a fresh-water lake. It has a river entering it at Caesarea-Philippi, and there is a river running out of it, which is the Jordan River. It is a pear-shaped lake with the wide part in the north. It is 13 miles long and eight miles wide at its widest part. And it sits 680 feet below sea level. I've heard that the Sea of Galilee is the lowest fresh-water lake on planet earth. But around the lake are high mountains, and beyond the mountains is a warm, high-desert plain. And the warm winds come off the desert, through the mountain canyons, which compresses the air, then it swoops down over the lake. It's like the winds here in Southern California that come down the Cajon Pass. So the winds would hit the lake and would create up to ten-foot waves.

So when they started off sailing, everything was fine. Jesus was in the boat taking a nap. It probably was a moonlit night. Everything was cool. Then all of a sudden the storm hit. It was unexpected and unannounced. Verse 23, "They were filling with water, and were in jeopardy." Imagine the picture. These guys were seasoned fishermen. And the other Gospel indicates that despite that, they were actually fearful for their lives.

Here is the lesson. Did Jesus know a storm would come? Yes. Does Jesus know when the storms come in your life? Yes. Not only did Jesus know the storm was coming, but I believe that Jesus planned the storm; it was part of their daily curriculum to teach them faith and trust. It was an opportunity for Jesus to reveal His person to them, so they would come to know Him better.

The same is true in our lives. God knows the storms we face, and God's hand is on it, He planned it, He designed it; it is part of our daily curriculum to test and strengthen our faith, so

we might “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

There are different kinds of storms that come into our lives as Christians. There are corrective storms. When Jonah was out of the will of God, he got in a boat and tried to run from God. He was in a storm, was thrown overboard and a whale swallowed Jonah. He went from the storm to the whale, and then the whale spit him up on the beach. So he had a change of heart and said, “Yes, Lord! I’ll go to Nineveh!” You don’t want to get swallowed by a whale!

I’ve been on airplanes where people have told me, “I’m so glad, Pastor Miller, that you’re on the plane; I’m a little bit afraid to fly! It’s so nice to see a minister on the plane!” And I’m thinking to myself, How do you know I’m not a Jonah? We may go down and get swallowed by a whale.

Jonah was running from the will of God, so God brought a storm to correct him and get him back on track.

But not only are there corrective storms; there are constructive, instructive storms. The storm in our text was an instructive storm. I believe God wants to get our attention and teach us a lesson in faith and trust.

Remember that the disciples were obediently following Jesus’ command, in verse 22. Jesus command them to get in the boat and “cross over to the other side of the lake.” He didn’t say, “Go under”; He said, “Go over.” They got in the boat, were crossing over and were in the will of God. So the point is that storms can come, even when you’re in the will of God.

Jonah was out of the will of God, and God was correcting him. But you can be in the will of God, and God will still build you up and instruct you. God allows storms in our lives to bring us into a deeper relationship with Him. I believe that with all my heart.

This isn’t a pleasant process; “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” (Hebrews 12:11).

One of my favorite passages that illustrates this—and I quote it so often—is 2 Corinthians 12. It’s Paul’s thorn in the flesh. He said, “Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure” (2 Corinthians 12:7). God had caught him up to the third heaven to see unspeakable things (2 Corinthians 12:4). So because of “the abundance of the revelations...a thorn in the flesh was given to me.”

Who gave this thorn to Paul? It was God. This thorn was most likely some physical ailment, but it was allowed and given by God. You say, “But it was ‘a messenger of Satan!’” God controls the devil. The devil can do nothing to you but what God allows or approves or that is filtered through His love and care. Rest assured of that. Nothing can happen to you but what is allowed by your loving, gracious Father in heaven.

So Paul said that he prayed and asked God to take away the thorn, God didn't take it away, but He said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Then Paul said, "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me....For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

God gives you thorns, God gives you storms to humble you and to make you rely upon His all-sufficient grace. Someone put it in a poem:

"I asked the Lord that I might grow

In faith and love and every grace,

Might more His salvation know

And seek more earnestly His face.

'Twas He who taught me thus to pray

And He, I trust, His answered prayer,

But it has been in such a way

As almost drove me to despair."

I like that.

So many times we say, "Lord, I want to grow. I want to be more like You. I want to go deeper; I want a stronger faith." God says, "Okay," and here comes a storm. It might be a storm of bereavement, a storm of disease, a storm of divorce, a storm of a relationship, a storm of finances or a storm of some other difficulty. Storms come in different shapes and sizes. But God uses them for our good and for His glory.

Now how did the disciples respond to this storm, verse 24? "And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!'" The repetition of the word "Master" means they were freaking out. "Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm." The disciples responded by coming to Jesus and called out for help. I like that.

By the way, you don't have to wake Jesus up. If something is going on in the middle of the night, you don't have to wait until He wakes up. He never sleeps or slumbers. He slept in our text because He was in a body that was not yet glorified. After his Resurrection, He now is in a glorified body in heaven and has become our sympathetic High Priest (Hebrews 4:15).

But the point is that when you are in distress, run to Jesus. Don't run from Jesus, don't run from His promises in His Word, don't run from His people at church and don't run to alcohol or

drugs or other forms of escapism; run to Jesus with everything you've got. Cry out to Him and He will hear your prayers.

The storm could not wake Jesus up, but the cries of His disciples did. God's ear is not heavy that He cannot hear (Isaiah 59:1). So God hears us when we cry out, when we call out to Him. When we seek the Lord, when we cast our cares upon God, He hears us in our hour of need.

It's funny to me that you have seasoned fishermen turning to a carpenter for help in a storm in a boat. Jesus could have awakened and said, "Woah! You guys are the fishermen; I'm only a carpenter! What are we gonna do?!" No. Jesus is Master of the seas and of all creation. Jesus created all things by "the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3). The cosmos, the billions of galaxies, billions of stars, light years stretched out into space were created by the power of His word. So it was no big deal for Him to speak to the waves.

When Jesus said to the waves to stop, in the Greek, it is literally "be muzzled." It's like a dog that needed to be muzzled. And what a miracle this was! A body of water that has been whipped into a frenzy by the wind and the wind now suddenly stops, it takes a while for the agitation of the water to dissipate. In the ocean when there is a strong onshore wind and the water gets very choppy, when the wind stops, the choppy waves remain for hours before they calm down. But Jesus, in His power, immediately calmed the raging storm.

Why were the disciples freaking out? Mark 4:38 says, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" And in the Greek, "perishing" is in the present tense. Then in Matthew 8:26, Jesus asks them, "Why are you fearful?" For the same reasons that we are fearful. Let me give you three reasons. Number one, they forgot His promise, in verse 22. Jesus said, "Let us cross over to the other side of the lake." If they had remembered that in the midst of the storm, they would have said, "Remember that Jesus said that we're going 'to the other side.'"

They're going from the west side of the lake to the east side, where they will encounter the demoniac of Gadara. They will go from a storm in the lake to a demon on the land. Some Bible scholars believe that the storm was created by the devil to kill Jesus and the disciples. I don't believe that. But needless to say, Jesus is controlling this situation.

So they forgot Jesus' promise, and they were fearful. When we too are in the storm, we need to remember His promises. He promised, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). He also promised, "As your days, so shall your strength be" (Deuteronomy 33:25). In Romans 8:28, He promised that "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." And Philippians 1:6 says, "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." So we rest in His promises. They help to still the storm in our hearts.

Number two, they forgot His presence. Jesus was with them in the boat. When Jesus is in your boat, you cannot sink.

"No storm can sink the ship where lies

The Master of earth and sea and skies.”

Is He in your boat? Is He in your marriage? In your home? In your heart? Then you can't sink. Jesus is in the boat with you.

Not only did they forget His promises and His presence, but, number three, they forgot His power. They had seen His power. They had seen His miracles. They read the psalms; they knew Jesus could heal, Jesus could save, Jesus could deliver, Jesus controlled the oceans.

This was a divine miracle, verse 24. “Then He arose and rebuked the wind...” I like that “...and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm.” This is a beautiful picture of how Jesus comes and calms the storms in our lives.

Psalms 107 was a psalm that my Dad read to me many times when I was growing up. It was his favorite psalm. He was stationed in the Aleutian Islands during World War II serving in the Coast Guard. He would read this psalm to me and tell me stories of his time at sea. Verses 23-30 say, “Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters, they see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep. For He commands and raises the stormy wind, which lifts up the waves of the sea. They mount up to the heavens, they go down again to the depths; their soul melts because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end. Then they cry out to the Lord in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses. He calms the storm, so that its waves are still. Then they are glad because they are quiet; so He guides them to their desired haven.”

I believe these disciples knew this psalm, and they could equate and put the two together. But they forgot His power.

Now the third part of our text is in verse 25, after the storm. The storm has been calmed. “But He said to them, ‘Where is your faith?’ And they were afraid, and marveled...” there's a storm going on in their hearts “...saying to one another, ‘Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!’” So two questions; the first one Jesus asked the disciples, and the second one the disciples asked themselves.

Jesus asked them, “Where is your faith?” In Mark 4:40, He said, “Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?” Jesus basically said that they didn't have any faith at all. At first glance, this question-rebuke of Jesus to them might seem harsh. After all, they were going down and Jesus was asleep.

What would you or I do?

By the way, for years I read the Bible about the storm and I knew that this was on a lake. So I thought, What a bunch of wimps! It's a lake! Who can't swim across a lake?! Then when I went to Israel and took a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee, I said, “I can't swim across this lake!” It's eight miles wide and thirteen miles long! So when I get to heaven, I'm going to apologize to these guys. They're not wimps. That was scary!

They're in the boat, it's at least four miles to the closest land, they're starting to sink and Jesus said, "Where is your faith"!

Basically they're saying, "Where do You think it is? It'll be at the bottom of the lake if You don't do something!" So they're freaking out.

But on the other hand, they had seen His miraculous power. They saw the Centurion's servant healed by the power of His word. They saw the widow of Nain's son raised from the dead.

One of the problems we have when we're going through a storm and we're freaking out is that we forget what God has done in the past. We forget, "Great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:23). And what about all the times that God saved, God healed and God delivered? We so easily forget.

"Who can this be?" Another translation says, "Who is this man?" The answer is, "It's Jesus, the Son of God! He's God in the flesh." John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In the Greek, it's even stronger: "God was the Word." So He is the eternal Word—"In the beginning was the Word"; He's the personal Word—"with God," face to face the Son with the Father; and He's the divine Word—"the Word was God." John 1:14 says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." And John 1:18 says, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him."

When they asked in the boat, "Who can this be?" it was God in the flesh. They couldn't comprehend that. It didn't compute. So they were freaking out and still wondering who Jesus was. He is the Creator, the Sustainer and the Redeemer.

If you acquaint yourself with Jesus, you can be at peace. One of the benefits of studying the Gospel is getting to know Jesus better. He has the power over nature, the power over demons, the power over disease, the power over death; Jesus can be trusted.

So when you go through a storm, remember this: First, run to Jesus, cry out to Him in prayer. Psalm 46:1 says, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Second, trust in Jesus.

If you're not in a storm, you will be. And when you are, run to Jesus and trust in Jesus.