

Strength In Life's Storms

John 6:15-21

Pastor John Miller

We're going to read the whole section, John 6:15-21, and then we're going to come back and apply it to our lives. It says, "When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone. 16 And when even was now come, his disciples went down unto the sea," this is the Lake Galilee, "And entered into a ship," the word "ship" would be better translated boat, "and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them. 18 And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. 19 So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid," that's King James for freaking out, "But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid." In the other gospels, "Be of good cheer, it is I; be not afraid." 21 Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went."

Someone once said that God has only one Son without sin, but none without sorrow. I'm not sure who said that, but I've always loved it. I think it's so good: one Son without sin, but none without sorrow. Into every life a storm must come. Every one of us is going to go through the storms of life. There's no Christian fallout shelter. We're not immune from the sorrows, the trials, and the hardships of life. It really surprises me when sometimes Christians come and say, "I can't believe this is going wrong or that's happening," or "Why would God let this," or "Why would God let that," and I realize that we sometimes wrestle with that; but as we grow in the Lord, we need to understand some things about storms: why God allows them, what God's doing, and that God's in control.

We're going to look at the fifth miracle in John's gospel. Remember, there are seven. Well, if you're taking notes or writing notes down, this is miracle number five. This is the miracle of Jesus walking on water and calming the storm. There's actually about five miracles in the story. In the conclusion tonight, I'll wrap it up by pointing them all out. I want to give you four wonderful truths to hold onto for passing through the storms of life. Maybe tonight you're going through a storm, these points will help you. These are four statements of faith that will help you as you pass through the storms of life.

The first, if you're taking notes and want to write it down, is that when you're going through a storm at a time of difficulty, you tell yourself, "He brought me here." This is kind of a talk to yourself sermon, by the way. Take down these points because you're going to have to tell them to yourself when you're in the midst of the storm. When you're in the midst of a storm, remind yourself that He brought me here. Write down: His purpose. He brought me here. I want you to notice it in verses 16 and the first part of verse 17. "And when even was now come, his disciples went down unto the sea," now we're going to back up in just a moment to verses 14-15, but last week we saw Jesus multiplied the bread and the fish and fed five thousand—that's just men, not counting women and children, so fifteen or maybe twenty thousand people

— were fed with five little barley loaves and a couple little fish. Jesus performed that marvelous miracle, so the crowds were thronging and following Him. He is on the northeast corner of the Sea of Galilee in the hills outside the Lake Galilee, when this miracle took place. Now, it's after the miracle of the loaves and the fishes, and evening was coming. This would be sometime between three o'clock and five in the afternoon. "...his disciples went down unto the sea, 17 And entered into a ship," boat, "and went over the sea toward," notice this, "Capernaum."

Capernaum is on the northwest corner, they were on the northeast corner, so they're going to go to the northwest corner. They're going to cut just across the top of the lake, and not to turn there in your Bible right now, but remember I talked about the Lake Galilee is in the northern area of Galilee. It's pear-shaped with the large part at the top and narrows at the bottom. It's about 13 miles long, north to south, and around 7-8 miles wide. That's going to come into play in our study. It's a beautiful freshwater lake, but Jesus puts His disciples in the boat and sends them across the lake.

Now, I'm going to cross-reference, I don't want you to turn, I just want you to write them down because it would take too much time turning. I'm going to cross-reference the other accounts in Mark and in Matthew to fill in the gaps. John's gospel is the most abbreviated because John doesn't really focus so much on this miracle, he focuses on the loaves and the fishes, and it goes into the discourse of Jesus being the bread of life. We're going to start that next week. It is a marvelous, marvelous teaching of Jesus being the bread of God that comes down from heaven that if a man eats thereof, he will never hunger; if he drinks of Me, he will never thirst.

Before he gets into the discourse, there's this miracle of the calming of the storm and the walking on the sea. In Mark 6:45, it actually says there that Jesus put them in the boat and "constrained his disciples...to go to the other side." You say, "Why is that significant?" It's significant because they were on the lake out of obedience to Jesus. The reason they were out on the lake for this midnight boat ride was because Jesus put them in the boat, constrained them, and sent them off. We're going to see that Jesus then went up to a mountain, apart by Himself, to pray. The point that I want to make is that they were in the storm because they obeyed Jesus. They were in the storm because they were being obedient to Jesus. They were in the will of God.

Did you know that storms can come into your life in the will of God? It doesn't necessarily mean you're out of the will of God, that can be sometimes why God will allow a storm to bring us back to Him; but you can be right smack-dab in the center of God's will, and you can run into a storm. You can be doing God's work and run into a storm. You can be serving the Lord. As a matter of fact, when you serve the Lord—I promise you—you will hit storms. When you get serious about evangelism and winning others to Christ—I promise you—satan will come after you, and you will run into storms.

This storm was a divine storm allowed by Jesus, I believe, to teach them a lesson. Now, Jesus put them in a boat, sent them across the lake, and He knew that the storm would come. This is the point: When you're in a storm, when you're facing trouble and you're in the darkness of

night, and the winds are blowing against you, that doesn't mean that God doesn't love you. It doesn't mean that God is not in control. It doesn't mean God doesn't know what He's doing. It doesn't mean that God has forgotten or has abandoned you. Jesus was in control of everything that was happening.

In 1 Peter 4:19, it says, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator." One of the reasons I love that statement by Peter is because he says, "let them that suffer in the will of God." There are some preachers today that say if you're in the will of God, you're going to prosper, flourish, everything will be wonderful, nothing will ever go wrong, and nothing bad will ever happen to you. Peter says it pretty clearly that you can suffer in the will of God, and when you do, you commit your soul to Him as unto a faithful Creator. Jesus knew the storm would come. The question is: Why, then, did He send them into the storm? The answer to that is back in verses 14-15.

Back up to verse 14. It says, "Then those men, when they had seen the miracle," now that miracle in verse 14 is a reference to the multiplying of the bread and the fish, "that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world." Now, notice verse 15, "When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone." The truth is, before He left for the mountain alone, and the other gospel said He went there to pray, He put them in the boat and constrained them to go out upon the lake. Here's the point. The point is: Jesus knew that there was a danger that they could be puffed up with pride with all the excitement, all the attention, everyone was looking at them, everyone was clamoring for them because they provided food for them.

You feed people, they'll love you. You give them free this and free that and free this and free that, there's politicians that know that, by the way, everything's going to be free and nothing is going to cost you. Somebody's gonna have to pay for it. But because He fed them, they followed Him. Now, it is true that Jesus came to be a King and He was the King, and it is true that He would reign upon the earth, but that's not til His Second Coming. He will have an earthly kingdom, but it will be spiritual in its nature. It'll be the Kingdom Age. At this time, it wasn't the Father's plan or purpose or time for Him to be taken by force by people who had the wrong motives for political reasons, for materialistic reasons—we want bread. This guy can give us bread to eat? He gets my vote. He's the King.

Now, they did say that He was "...that prophet that should come into the world." We talked about that last week. That's the statement from Deuteronomy where Moses said that the Lord would raise up a Prophet like unto me, unto him shall you hear. In the Old Testament, Moses said, "God will raise up...a Prophet...like unto me," and they recognized that this is Him. Jesus realized that this wasn't God the Father's time, and in humility, He avoids the crowd, avoids the attention, avoids the accolades, avoids the physical attempt to make Him king, and slips out alone. The danger was that they were going to be influenced by the crowds.

It's been a common thing that when people are used by God, many times they get proud thinking that they are the anointed one of God. It's a distraction, and they fall into pride. We are safer in the will of God in the storm than in the crowd out of the will of God. These disciples were going to be going into a storm, but they were safer in the storm than they were in the crowd. You know, sometimes God allows a storm in your life to keep you humble, to keep you dependent on Him? I use the term, "pull the rug out." God will pull it out lovingly. He pulls it out nice and gently and lovingly, but He will pull the rug out from under you and allow you to fall down so that you'll turn to Him and say, "God, help me. God, I need You." You turn to Him.

Jesus was protecting them by putting them in the storm. I have learned from my trials and hardships in life, and I still sometimes struggle with it, but I realize that as I look back, many of the hardest periods and times in my life were allowed by God to serve His purpose, to serve His plan, to be working in my life for my good. God allows storms in our lives for a couple of different reasons. First of all, for correction. Sometimes there's sin in our lives and God brings the storm to get us back on the path, or maybe we get out of the will of God, and things go wrong because God's trying to bring us back into His will.

Remember Jonah was told to go to Ninevah, but he went to Joppa. He got a ship and went to Tarshish. Wait a minute, Jonah, God told you to go to Ninevah, but he went the other direction. What did Jonah encounter on that ship? A big bad storm, right? Which is funny, too, because God sent the storm, he's sleeping in the boat. All these sailors were rowing and throwing water over and Jonah's sleeping in the bottom of the boat. He's sleeping out of the will of God in the middle of the storm. It's interesting that he was out of the will of God, but there was a boat there to take him to Tarshish. When he got in the boat, he should've trusted the Lord. Finally, he's thrown overboard and swallowed by a whale. I do happen to believe that there was actually a big whale or fish or some kind of giant fish in the sea that swallowed Jonah. Can you imagine spending three days inside a whale? Jonah was so hardened that he was just hard down there, and he finally turned to God and repented of his sin. God had Jonah, I like to say, barfed on the beach. He came up on that beach and started preaching. He was still kind of hard in heart and rebelling against God, but God brought that storm into Jonah's life to correct him, to get him back on the straight and narrow, to get him back on the path.

God may want to bring something into your life. There have been times that things have come into my life, and I just know that God was speaking to me about my prayer life, my devotion, my focus, or things that have come into my life that needed to be straightened out or get right with God. If you're in a storm tonight, search your heart and say, "Lord, what is it You want to do? What do You want to show me? What do You want to teach me?" God also allows storms in our lives for protection, as I've already pointed out, to keep us humble, to keep us from the danger of pride. Write down 2 Corinthians 12. I allude to or reference it so much. It's one of my favorite little sections of Corinthians where Paul says, "...through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." Notice he said, "there was given to me," the question is who gave it to him? My answer is that God gave it to him. God allowed Satan to buffet his flesh. Why did God allow that? To keep him humble. Paul's paradise experience could have

filled him with pride, so God gave him a painful experience to keep him humbled and dependent. Someone said,

I thank God for bitter things;

They've been a 'friend to grace';

They've driven me from paths of ease

To storm the secret place.

I thank Him for the friends who failed

To fill my heart's deep need;

They've driven me to the Savior's feet,

Upon His love to feed.

I'm grateful too, through all life's way

No one could satisfy,

And so I've found in God alone

My rich, my full supply!

I know that that's really difficult to come to that place, but what a blessed place that is when God uses those thorns in our flesh to humble us so that we can be used by Him. There's correction storms and protection storms to keep us humble and dependent and usable on Him. The first thing you remind yourself in a storm is: He brought me here. He is in control. His purposes will be accomplished, and we should glorify Him in the midst of the storm.

Write down the second thing that you need to affirm and remind yourself of, that is, that He is praying for me. Go back to verse 15. It says, "...that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king," so this is what Jesus did, "he departed again into a mountain himself alone." It doesn't say in John that He went there to pray, but in Mark and in Matthew, they both mention the fact that Jesus went to pray. Mark 6:46 says, "And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray." Before I forget, isn't it interesting that Jesus just did this marvelous miracle, provided all this wonderful food, and it was just an awesome thing. Lots of people saw the miracle. This miracle of walking on water and calming the sea, only the disciples saw it, so it wasn't really that public. But right after this glorious experience, after this mountaintop experience, Jesus knew that they were all vulnerable and dangerous to attack.

You know when satan likes to attack? Right after some mountaintop of blessing—right after

you come to church on Wednesday night, right after you come to church on Sunday, after you've led someone to Christ, after you've read your Bible, after you've done something or you've been to church and you're caught up in the blessing—that's right when satan wants to come and rob that blessing from us.

Jesus goes to the mountain to pray, so the disciples' safe place was in a storm. For Jesus, His safe place was on His face talking to His Father spending time in prayer. That really spoke to me as well. After God uses you and there's miracles working in and through your life, be careful. Take time to get on your knees, pray, and keep your eyes on Jesus Christ. Jesus went to the mountain and prayed for them. I believe that Jesus could see them on the lake toiling and was most likely praying for them. Did you know that the Bible teaches that one of the things Jesus is doing in heaven right now, and we don't often stop to think about that, but it's like, "What is Jesus doing now? What's He got to do up there in heaven? What's keeping Him occupied?" One of those things is praying for you and me, and some of you He even has to pray a lot for.

Remember when Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Peter, satan desires to have you." Can you imagine how frightening that would be to have Jesus turn to you and say, "Hey, satan called Me and said he wants you." You'd be thinking, Whoa! What'd You tell him? You didn't say, 'Yes,' did You? Jesus said, "I prayed for you, Peter. You're going to stumble, you're gonna fall on your face and fail, but when you are restored, I want you to strengthen your brothers." Note that Jesus said, "I prayed for you." Write down John 17:9. There, Jesus prayed for us. In Hebrews 7:25 it says, "...he ever liveth to make intercession for them," that is, the people of God. Jesus, right now, is praying for you in heaven. When you're discouraged, when you're going through a storm, when you're being buffeted by the winds and the problems of life just remember that Jesus sees you, He knows, He understands, and He's praying for you. Now, that doesn't mean that we don't need to pray for ourselves. We do need to pray for ourselves, but we can rest assured that Jesus is interceding for us.

Here's the third thing that we need to remind ourselves of (and this is the heart of the story) when we're passing through a storm; that is, He will come to me when I'm in the storm. First, He brought me into the storm. Second, He's praying for me as I pass through the storm and He sees and He knows. This is the most precious, He will come to me. We have His purpose, His prayers, and now when we're in the storms we have His presence. John Bunyan said, "In times of affliction, we most commonly meet with the sweetest experiences of the love of God." Notice at the end of verse 17, "And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them." John, writing after this episode some years, pointed out that Jesus had not arrived yet. Maybe He was going to meet them on the shore or they had a plan to meet Him in a different location or he was writing with hindsight knowing the story that He was going to appear to them and wanted to make it clear that they had not seen Him yet.

Verse 18, "And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew." The Sea of Galilee, this body of water that I just described a moment ago, this big freshwater lake, sits 700 feet below sea level. All around it are mountains with deep canyons and high deserts. To the west is the

Mediterranean Sea, so the winds from different directions come whipping through the mountain canyons—kind of like our Cajon Pass and our Santa Ana winds—and they whip down onto that lake and hit the water creating big waves. This 13 mile long, 8 mile wide body of water with the strong winds that come swooping down can really produce some large waves on the sea. The Scriptures say, “the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. 19 So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs,” that is a distance of about 3-1/2 miles. If the lake is about 8 miles wide, they were almost in the middle of the lake.

Now, for years when I read this story, I used to say, “What’s wrong with these fishermen? They’re out on the lake. They should be strong swimmers. How big can a lake be?” I spend time in the ocean, and that can be a frightening thing to be in the ocean. It’s humongous and very powerful; but a lake, you know, it’s like, “All you gotta do is just swim to the shore,” until I got in a boat and rode across the Lake Galilee. When you’re out four miles, it’s four miles to the shore—that way is four miles to that way. I’m thinking, I’m glad I have a life vest on. If the boat went down right now, I’m not sure that I could swim four miles to the shore, especially when there’s a strong wind and high waves. They were filled with fear that they were going to be done in. It says that “they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship.”

Another little insight is that Jesus comes to them walking in what is called the fourth watch of the night, which is early morning. It’s actually 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. If you put the timeframe together, Jesus put them in the boat at evening, sent them out on the lake, now He comes to them in the midst of the storm and it’s sometime between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. in the morning. They had rowed against the storm for possibly 8-9 hours. They’re exhausted. They were probably going against the headwind with their backs to the wind with the shore in sight. Then, they see what they thought was a ghost coming at them. You know, it’s rough hanging out with Jesus. He can really freak you out. He sent them into the midst of the storm, and they’re probably, in the midst of the storm, wondering, “Where’s Jesus, anyway? Whose idea was this midnight boat ride?” “It was Jesus.” “Where is He?” “I don’t know. He’s up on the mountain, warm and cozy, praying right now.” Don’t you hate it when you go on a camping trip and everything goes wrong? You think, “Whose idea was this camping trip anyway?” And, the person that had the idea didn’t even go on the camping trip. You’re stuck.

Jesus was in control, and He comes walking on the water. They start screaming, “Aaaaahhhh! Aaaaahhhh!” these big strong fisherman, “Aahhhhhh!” The other gospels have a cool little element to the story—Jesus made as though He would walk right by them. How cool is that? They’re freaking out. He finally gets in view, It’s Jesus, and He just kind of goes, “Hey, guys, what’s happening?” He’s out for a walk in the afternoon, you know, they’re like, “We’re gonna die and You just go walking by! What’s going on?” Jesus comes to them in the midst of the storm, and that’s the point I want to make: In the storms of life, we encounter and experience the presence of God in a way that we would never have experienced apart from the storms. This is why we thank God for the bitter things because they’ve been a “friend to grace.” This is why in times of affliction we most commonly meet with the sweetest experiences of the love of God. Jesus comes to us. It doesn’t mean that Jesus isn’t with us, but He comes and manifests His presence.

Remember when Paul was on a ship as a prisoner being sent to Rome and he hit a storm? The Bible actually says that the Lord stood right next to Paul in the midst of that storm, and God said to him, "I'm going to be with you. As you testified of Me in Jerusalem, so will you testify of Me in Rome." I believe that when Paul was in the dungeons and in prison that he had the sweetest experiences of the love of God. I believe that in a hospital bed, in a bed of affliction, in a time of adversity, whatever you're going through, Jesus comes to you and speaks His peace to you.

We have His purpose, His prayers, His presence, and His peace. He said, "Peace be unto you." "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." He comes to them in the darkest time of the night; and the waves, which they thought would undo Him, were the very things that brought Jesus closer to them. V. Raymond Edman said, "Never doubt in the dark what God has spoken in the light." How true that is. Then, Jesus spoke, I love that, in verse 20 and said, "It is I; be not afraid." God speaks to us in the storms of life. Those are the times when we hear God shout. Those are the times we hear clearly God's voice.

What the Bible doesn't tell us right here in John's gospel, but it does in Matthew. The story is in Matthew, Mark, and in John; but only Matthew tells us about Peter stepping out of the boat and walking to Jesus. That's in Matthew 14. It says, "And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. 29 And he said, Come." I love that. "And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. 31 And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Peter says, "Lord, if it's You, bid me come," and Peter steps out of the boat. I'm thinking, What are you thinking, Peter? Think about how radical this is. The other disciples were kind of like, "Where are you going, Dude?" He steps out of the boat and actually begins to walk on water.

In Egyptian hieroglyphics they have found the symbol of what is considered the word "impossible." It's two little feet on top of water because it's just an impossibility. Guess what? Jesus is the Creator of the water, so He can suspend all the laws of nature because He is the God of the laws of nature. He can do whatever He wants.

Jesus comes walking out on the lake, and this is a miracle. We can't explain it any other way than Jesus is God in flesh. Then, He says to Peter, "Come, Peter." Peter starts walking. Now, Peter's doing fine as long as he keeps his eyes on Jesus. The minute he turns his eyes off of Jesus and starts to look at the waves, he realized, "What am I doing out here walking on the water?" Peter began to sink. I've always wondered how far down did Peter sink before he said, "Lord, save me?" Maybe he was flailing and flapping in the water, "Lord, save me!" Probably, if I know Peter. To me, that's one of the greatest prayers in the Bible. He didn't even say, "In Jesus' name." He just said, "Lord, save me," but it was from his heart, and Jesus reached out and saved him. He didn't have time for, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name." He'd have been at the bottom of the sea. He starts to sink, Jesus reaches out, grabs him, and lifts him up. Isn't it wonderful when we're sinking in the storm and we get our eyes off

Jesus that Jesus hears our cry and comes to rescue us and to lift us up and to save us in our hour and our moment of need? Jesus comes to us when we're in the storms.

Fourthly, and lastly, this is another affirmation to make in the midst of a storm: He will see me through. He, that is, Christ, will see me through; and here we have His power. "Then they willingly received him into the ship," He probably came back in with Peter, "and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went." Only John makes this statement. The other gospels actually say that they wondered at Him, "Who is this Man, that even the wind and the waves obey Him, that can walk on water," and "Truly this is the Son of God," and worshipped Him. Scholars kind of debate as to whether there's the miraculous here in verse 21. I think there is. I think there is a miracle of Jesus walking on water, there's a miracle of Peter walking on water, there's the miracle of Jesus rescuing Peter from drowning in the water, there's the miracle of Jesus calming the water, the troubled seas, and the storms; and in verse 21, there's the miracle that the moment Jesus got in the boat (SNAP!) they were where they had to be. Isn't that cool? I believe that's a reminder that He comes to us in the storm, He prays for us in the storm, He speaks to us in the storm, He meets us in the storm, He takes us through the storm, and we reach our desired destiny. Amen?

The Bible tells us in Philippians 1:6, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ," so you can be confident no matter what your storm might be tonight—occupational uncertainty, maybe unemployment, maybe it's a conflict in your home, sickness, a bereavement or loss or sorrow—remember these things: 1. He brought me here. I have His protection. 2. He is praying for me. I have His prayers. 3. He will come to me. He comes and brings His presence. 4. He will see me through. I have His power. The boat was right where they needed to go. Jesus will see us through.

Amy Carmichael wrote a poem based on this story. I'd like to close with it. It's called "Comforted." She wrote the words:

A great wind blowing, raging sea,
And rowers toiling wearily,
Far from the land where they would be.
And then One coming, drawing nigh;
They care not now for starless sky.
The Light of life says, "It is I."
They care not now for toil of oar,
For lo, the ship is at the shore,

And their Beloved they adore.

Lord of the Lake of Galilee,

Who long ago walked on the sea,

My heart is comforted in Thee.

Let's pray.