

STORM STORIES

“THE CALM IN THE STORM”

Matthew 14:22-33

Introduction

Some of the bravest guys in the world are those who fly planes into hurricanes. But they have discovered that in the eye of the storm it is calm.

We often hear the phrases- “the calm before the storm” and “the calm after the storm”. But the calm in the center of the hurricane indicates that there can be a calm during a storm. That’s what I want to talk about today.

The world is a stormy place. We face all sorts of storms in this life: health issues, financial hardships, loss of job, the ending of a relationship, the loss of a loved one. This world is not heaven on earth. This life brings our share of hardships and difficulties.

Even the fact that we’re Christians does not exempt us from having to weather the storms of life.

In our story for today, Jesus commanded the disciples to get into a boat and go ahead of him to the other side of the lake. As they were sailing, a storm blew up. The disciples encountered a storm while they were being obedient to Jesus.

We will find that even though we walk faithfully with God, we will have to deal with life’s storms. The fact that Jesus is our companion doesn’t mean that we won’t have trouble. But the good news is that Jesus is our companion as we weather the storms of life.

Since the world is a stormy place, it is a scary place. It is a natural human emotion to be fearful, apprehensive and anxious when a storm of life hits. But with Jesus we can experience calm during the storm. He can bring peace to our troubled souls.

Do you know what is the most repeated command in Scripture? It is “fear not”. **Lloyd Ogilvie notes that there are 366 “fear not” verses in the Bible, one for every day of the year, including leap year!**

Jesus gave his disciples this command during this storm. He told them to not to be afraid. At least one disciple experienced the calm that Jesus can bring during a storm. It was Peter. Peter walked on the water during the storm!

Like Peter we too can experience God’s calm during the storms of life. Let’s look at the principles we can learn from Peter walking on the water with Jesus. These 3 principles will help us to have peace and not panic when we get slammed with a storm of life.

Principle # 1- If you want to experience God’s calm in a storm...

1. Realize Jesus’ Presence in your Life

In this story, as the disciples struggled with sailing their boat against the wind, Jesus walked out to them on the water. In Mark’s account of this story, he says that Jesus “intended to pass them by.” This doesn’t mean that Jesus was going to walk on pass them. It meant that he was going to appear to them.

When we lived in the Dutch community of Holland, Michigan, the people there had an interesting phrase they would use when they talked about dropping by someone’s home for a visit. They “went by” their house. Now to me, going by someone’s house meant that I just drove past it. But to the Dutch it meant stopping in for a visit.

That’s essentially what Jesus was doing when he was walking on the water and “intending to pass by” the disciples. It meant that he intentionally was making an appearance to them. He wasn’t going to pass them by. He was going to pass near them so that they could sense his presence and find courage in the middle of this storm.

Jesus told them- ***“Take courage! It is I.”*** His presence was meant to comfort them during this storm.

Jesus' presence comforted Peter. He replied to Jesus, "Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you on the water." Peter found courage to walk on the water in the presence of Jesus. Likewise, we can receive courage if we can get a sense of Jesus presence in the midst of our struggles.

The reality is that God is present during the difficult times in our lives. **Dale Brunner wrote- "According to Holy Scriptures, human extremity is the frequent meeting place with God."**

The challenge to us is to remember that God is with us during the storms of life. Here are a couple of suggests to help us realize His presence. First.....

a. reflect on God's promise to be with you.

We need to read and remember Scriptures like these:

"But now, this is what the Lord says, Fear not, for I have redeemed you; when you pass through the waters I will be with you." – Isaiah 43:1-2

"...And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." – Matthew 28:20

"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." – Hebrews 13:5

Another way that you can realize God's presence is to...

b. pray that God will help you realize His presence

Now, most of us usually pray- "Lord, please be with me as I am going through this difficult time." I have prayed that prayer.

When we pray, "Lord, please be with me" we're asking God to do something that he has already promised He would do. We don't have to ask Him to be with us. He already is.

Here's what I've learned to pray now. "Lord, please help me to sense your presence with me as I struggle with my problem. Help me to realize that you are with me just as you promised you will be."

Praying to realize God's presence has made a big difference in knowing that God is with me. I would encourage you to pray more in faith about God's presence. Instead of asking for Him to be with you, in faith, believe that He is and ask the Lord to help you realize his presence.

When we know that God is with us, we will receive the comfort of His presence, just as Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 25:4, our theme verse for this series- *"You have been....a shelter from the storm."*

Principle # 2 for knowing God's calm in the storm is this....

2. Have Faith in Jesus

Peter walked on the water but then he began to sink. He became afraid of the storm. Why?

Jesus attributed it to Peter's lack of faith. After Jesus rescued Peter, he confronted Peter's lack of faith- *"You of little faith, why did you doubt?"*

It wasn't that Peter didn't have any faith. He had enough faith to walk on the water a little. But then his small amount of faith gave way to fear and he began to sink. The problem was that Peter didn't have much faith. But Peter had enough faith to be saved.

I take comfort in the fact that Jesus rebuked Peter AS he was rescuing Peter. Because often times I am like Peter. I have faith, just not much faith at times. Aren't you like that too?

We're like the dad who brought his son to Jesus for healing. The Father pleaded with Jesus- "if you can do anything for my son, please help him." Jesus challenged his lack of faith- "What do you mean if I can? Everything is possible for those who believe." The man then cried out- "I believe, help my unbelief."

If we're honest, we'd have to admit that we believe, but doubt gets mixed in with our faith. That's a natural human tendency.

But that becomes a real problem during the storms of life. When we don't act in faith we become fearful. It is only through faith that we receive comfort and peace.

So how can our faith develop and grow to the point where we will trust God more and worry less? There are two main ways in which faith grows:

a. faith grows as we get to know God better

When are you most likely to trust a person more? After you've known them for a short period of time or after you've known them for years? You trust a person more after you get to know them better. The same is true with Jesus.

At first the disciples thought Jesus was a ghost walking on the water and they were terrified. But once they realized it was Jesus, Peter received the courage to walk on the water. Later on Peter would write about the principle of knowing God:

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him...” – 2 Peter 1:3

Peter stated that we experience God's power in our lives as we know him. So it follows that the more we get to know Him better, the more we will experience his power in our lives and the stronger our faith will become. Knowing God is the key.

When people wrestle with doubt, they tell themselves that they will try harder to have more faith. But faith is not increased through “trying harder.” Often times the harder we try to find faith the more we are filled with doubt.

Instead of trying to have more faith, just concentrate on getting to know God better. He is the Author of our faith. So it follows if we know him better we will then have more faith.

There is no secret magical formula for growing in our relationship with Christ. It all gets back to the basics- prayer, Bible study, worship and walking faithfully with God in one's life. We have to invest ourselves in

our relationship with God if we want to grow in our relationship with Him.

Jesus' presence will reassure us during the storms of life. The better we know Him, the more we will have the faith to trust him and the more peace we will experience.

The second main way that faith grows is this:

b. faith grows as we obey God

Peter experienced the calm of walking on the water during a storm as he obeyed Jesus' command to "come". Peter took the first step of obedience and he was able to walk on the water.

John Ortberg wrote- "If I'm going to experience a greater measure of God's power in my life, it will usually involve the first step principle, acting in faith, trusting God enough to take a step of obedience."

No matter what storm you're facing in your life, continue to obey God. In the midst of the storm is no time to quit obeying God. We may get discouraged and say, "what's the use", but disobedience does not strengthen our faith. Disobedience does not bring God's blessing into our lives.

While you are weathering a storm is when you need to stay obedient to God. It may be difficult. Your fear may try to paralyze you into inaction.

But, like Peter, we need to be obedient. We need to take a **first step of obedience** even when it is difficult to do so. When you do what God wants you to do, you will find that you will receive His strength to sustain you in a storm.

Here is the third principle to help us experience God's calm in the storm:

3. Focus on the Savior instead of the storm

When was Peter courageous and walking on the water? When he was looking at Jesus.

When was he scared and sinking? When he took his eyes off Jesus and looked at the wind.

It was a matter of perspective for Peter. The storm was there all the time. He was calm, at one point during the storm, because his focus was on Jesus. Being calm or being fearful depended on whether Peter was focusing on Jesus or on the storm.

When is it that you are most anxious and afraid during the difficult times of your life? It is when your thoughts are consumed by your problem. That's all that you can see. That's all that you think about. That's all you talk about is your problem. You're consumed with your problem and soon fear consumes you.

Like Peter, we need to focus on the Savior instead of the storm. It is when we look up to Jesus that we will receive his calm during our storm.

The difference between losing heart and taking heart, the difference between panic and peace is focus! Peter lost his focus at one point in his walk with Jesus. Sometimes we do as well. How can we maintain our focus or get our focus back on the Lord?

I find 3 things that Peter and the other disciples did that brought Jesus clearly into focus. First.....

a. focus by meditating on God's Word

In verse 27 Peter heard Jesus' words- "*Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.*" Peter believed Jesus' words.

It is when we focus on God's Word that we are focused on God. This will make us strong. In the first Psalm one characteristic of the spiritually strong person is that he/she meditates on the Word of God both day and night.

How do you meditate on God's Word? How many of you know how to worry? Get your hand up! Worry is when we are thinking about our problems all the time. Worry is focus on the negative.

If you know how to worry, you know how to meditate on God's Word. All meditation is, is to think about God's Word over an extended period of time. Meditation is where you go over a verse or passage of Scripture over and over again. Meditation is where you saturate your heart and mind with Scripture.

When you are scared by the storms of life, you are worrying about your problems. If you will meditate on God's Word instead of worrying about your problems, you will experience a greater measure of God's peace.

Just take a portion of God's Word and think about it over and over. Take a verse like

"I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength" or

"Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice" or

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble"

If you will focus on God's Word, you'll be focused on God and you will experience his calm in a storm. So when you become fearful, read your Bible.

A second thing to do to focus on the Lord is to...

b. focus in prayer

What did Peter do when he began to sink? He re-focused on Jesus. He cried out, "Lord, save me!" In other words, Peter prayed.

His prayer wasn't eloquent or filled with religious sounding words or phrases. It was simple and direct. "Help". A spiritual S.O.S.

Instead of talking about your problems all the time, talk to God about your problems. Ask Him for help. Your prayer doesn't have to be anything fancy, just an acknowledgement that you need the Lord.

Fretting over your problems doesn't calm your spirit and your soul. It is when you pray about your problems that you receive God's peace during your problems. The apostle Paul wrote:

“Don't worry about anything, instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank Him for all he has done.

“If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” – Philippians 4:6-7

A third way to focus on Jesus is to...

c. focus through worship

Look again with me at verse 33. Worshipping Jesus was the best way that the disciples regained their focus during this storm.

As I stated in my introduction, the world is a scary place because it is a stormy place. In order to get some perspective, you need to worship. Worship is a time to tune in to God and shut the world out.

Now if you are not in the habit of participating in the worship services on a regular basis, don't be surprised if you are fearful and anxious when a storm blows into your life.

On the other hand, regular worship helps us to maintain our perspective. In worship we're focused on God. We're reminded of what is truly important. We receive strength as we worship.

Now if you want to truly focus through worship, then really focus on Jesus as you worship. The disciples did. They worshipped him saying, “truly you are the Son of God.”

That, beloved, is the definition of worship. Worship is simply seeing Jesus. It's sensing his presence. It's giving him the praise that's in our hearts.

If you and I will focus on seeing Jesus as we worship, then we will have truly worshipped and we will be blest by it.

Conclusion

Psalm 107:29 says this:

“He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed.” – Psalm 107:29

Jesus can bring us calm during a storm as we...realize his presence...as we...have faith in him...and as we focus on him.

Invitation

The most troubled soul is the one who doesn't know Christ as Lord and Savior. But in the 23rd Psalm we are told that the Lord is the shepherd who can restore our soul.

If this morning, you desire the comfort of the Lord's salvation then we invite you to come and to receive Christ in faith. As you place your faith in Christ and are baptized into him you will receive forgiveness for your sins and the gift of eternal life in heaven.