

WHERE IS GOD IN THE STORM?

John 6:16-21 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

This message is a prophetic message for you and for me in the midst of our storms. If we will listen to the voice of God's Holy Spirit today, in the midst of what may be a great test of our faith, He wants to come to us walking on the high waves of our storm. After Jesus fed the 5,000 men along with all the women and children—20 to 30,000, that multitude of people were bent on making Jesus their king, defeating the Romans, and their goal was to do this by force. But for the record, remember this! Jesus will not be manipulated to do things by our force, our plan, or our manipulation. If you try to use Jesus, you'll lose Him. Jesus doesn't stick around to be a magic genie or to be the One who takes our plan and makes us look good. It doesn't matter if we declare Jesus is Messiah, God still knows our selfish motives and He will not be used, manipulated, or pushed into our little box to do what we want, or to change His mind to our agenda.

Notice the context of John 6:16-21. We read in John 6:14-15, "When the people saw the sign that He had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet/Messiah who is to come into the world." Perceiving then that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by Himself." Then in our text we read, in John 6:16, "When evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the Sea to Capernaum." John left out a number of important details of what happened that day as evening came. Matthew 14:22-24 records, "Immediately, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He dismissed the crowds. And after He had dismissed the crowds, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. When evening came, He was there alone, but the boat by this time was a long way from the land." Mark 6:45-47 adds, "Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He dismissed the crowd. And after He had taken leave of them, He went up on the mountain to pray. And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and He was alone on the land."

Don't mistake what happened here. Jesus knew the motives of the crowd, and He made His disciples get into the boat. He commanded them. He dispatched them--"Get out of here." Jesus knew the sentiments of His disciples had the crowds voiced to them their hopes to make Jesus king of Israel. The disciples would doubtless have gotten excited about that idea. Jesus averted that crisis and sent His disciples back, past the west side of Bethsaida, to Capernaum. His disciples didn't know all the reasons, but they were acting in obedience as they oared their way to the west that evening. The distance across the way was only 4-5 miles. All was calm and serene as these experienced sailors began to sail toward the sunset. It had been a great day—and they had seen and witnessed the power of Jesus, the Son of God. The calmness on the Sea of Galilee was short-lived. A gathering storm darkened the sunlight, and it made the darkness come sooner. This is not rare for the Sea of Galilee which sits in a bowl, 682 feet below sea level. The foothills of Mt. Hermon form narrow gorges that act as wind tunnels as cooler air from Mt. Hermon swoops down and with strong winds like we get on Flaming Gorge, the waters can begin to become four to six feet high, and it takes

experienced sailors to keep a boat facing the storm so that the waves don't swamp the boat. These disciples now were in a battle for their lives, as Matthew 14:24 tells us, "They were beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. Mark 6:48 tells us, "they were making headway painfully for the wind was against them." We know about another storm at sea where the disciples lost hope of living, when Jesus was asleep in the boat, prior to this storm. Luke 8:22-25 tells the story of the disciples waking Jesus up in the storm, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing." Jesus awoke, rebuked the wind and the raging waters, saying, "Peace, be still!" Be assured, Jesus was praying on the mountain alone, and the disciples were alone in the boat. Here are powerful lessons we all need to learn from this night of the disciples straining at the oars. Seven lessons!

LIKE THE DISCIPLES, WE CAN KEEP FAILING THE SAME TESTS GOD GIVES US OVER AND OVER AGAIN. (I.)

We read in John 6: 18-20, "The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus, walking on the water, and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. But He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Test # 1 was, the disciples faced the 5,000 men who needed to be fed, (1) When you face overwhelming, crushing needs, don't calculate without Jesus. Now Test # 2 was that the disciples were facing a great storm in the darkness, as Jesus seemed far away. Would they learn the lesson after Jesus fed the 5,000, or would they forget, and still calculate without Jesus? Again, they failed the same test. They had understood what the multitude discovered that Jesus was the Prophet who was to come, Messiah, and that He has power over creation—to multiply five barley loaves and two fish to feed 20-30 thousand people and still have leftovers. But in darkness, and facing drowning in a storm, they again calculated without Jesus. Mark 6:53 tells us, "For they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened." Aren't you thankful Jesus is a persistent Teacher to all of us who can be slow of heart to learn. When we fail a test, Jesus often repeats the test, even over and over until we learn and pass the test. That's how the Lord teaches us to be conformed to His image. What a Teacher we have! Secondly,

LIKE THE DISCIPLES, WE OFTEN CANNOT FEEL JESUS' PRESENCE, AND WE DESPAIR, FORGETTING HE AT TIMES, HIDES HIMSELF. (II.)

We read in Mark 6:45, "the boat was out on the sea, and He was alone on the land." That means the disciples were alone, in the dark, in the storm. Does the Lord ever purposely test us and hide Himself or let us be alone without feeling or sensing His presence? The disciples doubtless knew David's Psalm 139:7-12. 'Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence. If I ascend to heaven, You are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, 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 cover me, and the light about me be night," even the darkness is not dark to You; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with You." You may ask me, "Does the Lord sometimes test us by hiding Himself? Isaiah the Prophet in 45:15, tells us, "Truly, You are a God who hides Himself, O God of Israel, the Savior." David himself cried out words Jesus repeated to His Father on the cross, in Psalm 22:1, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?" David also

said in Psalm 10:1, “Why, O Lord, do You stand far away? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?” David cried out in Psalm 38:1, “Do not forsake me, O Lord! O my God, be not far from me.” David repeated these words in Psalm 71:12, “O God, be not far from me; O my God, make haste to help me.” Job encountered this feeling that God didn’t seem present. Have you been there, not feeling the presence of the Lord? Most of us know a bit of what Job and the disciples faced. Job said in Job 23:3, 8-10, “Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I may come even to His seat! Behold, I go forward, but He is not there, and backward, but I do not perceive Him; on the left hand when He is working, I do not behold Him; He turns to the right hand, but I do not see Him. But He knows the way that I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” Beloved, God tests our faith often. Our faith is on trial. Will we trust God in the dark and in the storm when we cannot see Him. When we are flying on airplanes, how often have we traveled in clouds when do not see above the clouds to see the sun nor do we see below the clouds to see the earth. Is the earth still underneath us? Is the sun still above us? Have we despaired when the feeling of God’s presence is not strong? Have we been tempted to believe we are out of God’s will because we do not feel His presence? When we feel this way, we need to cry to God and to each other to pray for us. Saints long before us have faced the same darkness and the storm.

The apostle Paul wrote in II Corinthians 1:8-11, wrote, “For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us. On Him we have set our hope that He will deliver us again. You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.” When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, He said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” When not feeling God, we mustn’t lose faith and despair. He promised, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5) When Jesus hasn’t come visibly to us as with the disciples, He’s still there. Thirdly,

LIKE THE DISCIPLES, WE CAN BE CALLED TO ENTER A STORM AT THE LORD’S DIRECTION AS HIS PLANNED TEST. (III.) That means that we are in a storm because God has told us to be there, and He has even sent us there. In John 6:16, we read the disciples got into the boat, but Matthew 14:22 and Mark 6:45 tells us, “Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him across the sea, John 6:16 to Capernaum. You may say, “Why would God ever send us into a storm, as part of His plan? Why would God ever ask us to do something where danger would be ahead as we walk in obedience to Him? Think of Paul’s missionary journeys and his call from Jesus. From the moment of Paul’s call to go to the Gentiles with the Gospel, God called him into a storm. We read in II Corinthians 11:23-27, “Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day, I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger

from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.” I know you are thinking, “Why would God love me and call me into a storm? Or more specifically, why would Jesus be praying for me up on the mountain, and leave us disciples down in the storm all night? Jesus sent them away alone in the boat at sunset. We read in Matthew 14:25 and Mark 6:48, “And in the fourth watch of the night (3-6 AM) Jesus came to them, walking on the sea.” From 6PM to 6 AM is 12 hours, til’ 3 AM is 9 hours. Why? If we are circumstantial Christians, in the interim where God doesn’t show up, we often hear folk say, “I’m in a storm and God isn’t helping me. I must be out of His will.” Why do we send our children to grade school, high school, college, and on? There is little learning without tests. God’s tests are to test our metal and prove our spiritual growth. Fourthly,

LIKE THE DISCIPLES, WE WILL FIND OUR LIVES WILL NEVER BE ONE CONTINUOUS SERIES OF MIRACLES. (IV.) We read Jesus never came walking to them on the water until they had rowed 3-4 miles. John 6:19. That previous day was a day of miracles. This night was a night doing what? They were beaten by the waves, Mt. 14:24, and Mark 6:48 tells us that “they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them.” If we could have heard them, there was probably yelling and screaming in the darkness. In our own Christian experiences, we find that the Gospel message speaks to long-term suffering, unanswered prayers, seasons of depression, and times of unrelenting opposition. We then learn to walk by faith, not by sight. Think of where these disciples were. Their arms were exhausted. They were nowhere near the shore. We live in a world that decries such a position, saying if you aren’t going forward, you’re going backward. It’s not true. No, there are times when we do well just to hold our position, keeping the boat afloat, facing the storm. We read in Ephesians 6:13-14, “And having done all to stand firm, Stand therefore.” Keep pulling on the oars. But don’t pull at the oars in your own strength—The answer to life isn’t work harder. Paul said in Colossians 1:29, “For this I toil, struggling with all His energy that He powerfully works within me.” Stay the course, but never in your own strength. David wrote in Psalm 38:39, “For You have equipped me with strength for the battle” Fifthly,

LIKE THE DISCIPLES, WE NEED TO KNOW BEFORE WE SEE JESUS, HE FIRST SEES US STRUGGLING IN OUR STORM. (V.) John 6:19, “They saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat.” But double back to Mark’s testimony in Mark 6:48, “And Jesus saw that they were making headway painfully.” We are never beyond the range of Jesus’ sight, even when we can’t see Him. When Jesus sees us bucking spiritual or physical headwinds, He is interceding for us to His Father. What if the disciples could have heard Jesus interceding on the mountain for them? Have you ever overheard someone praying for you? I have and in 1974, hearing our church pray for me in my dire sickness is part of why I know I got well. The One who died to save us, ever lives to intercede and keep us. Sixthly,

LIKE THE DISCIPLES, WE ALL NEED TO HEAR HIM CALL TO US AS HE IS WALKING ON THE WATER. (VI.) John was selective in his account of Jesus

walking on the water, and in so doing, he left out one major part of that story. All we see when the disciples finally saw Jesus themselves, was that they were frightened. John 6:19, and in v. 20, Jesus said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” But Matthew 14:28-33 tells us the rest of the story. Listen. We read, “And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” He said, “Come. So, Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” Jesus immediately reached out His hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.” I believe God wants us all at times to get out of the boat to walk to Jesus on the waves of our storms. But it will do no good at all unless we keep our eyes on the Lord. Oh yes, Jesus will pick us up from drowning in the waves, when we cry, “Lord, save me.” God has called me different days this week to come to Him walking on the waves of the stormy sea I have been on. Perhaps He’s calling you now. Seventhly,

LIKE THE DISCIPLES, WE MUST LEARN TO RESPOND TO JESUS AS THEY RESPONDED. (VII.) Notice John 6:17,19, and 21. Jesus was helping His disciples to build their confidence in Him and to find comfort in Him. But how did Jesus get the disciples from being slow of heart to a place of confidence and comfort in Him? (1) **The disciples responded by walking in obedience to Jesus.** Notice John 6:17 “They got into a boat, and they started across the sea to Capernaum.” Do we walk in obedience to Jesus? Jesus never walked on water to meet them until they obeyed His dispatching command. (2) **The disciples recognized the One who had total dominion and authority given to Him.** Oh, yes, they were frightened, and some thought He was a ghost-Mt. 14:25. But this same Jesus in Matthew 28:18 said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Jesus walks on water. He can reach us wherever we are. No barriers are beyond His intervention. (3) **The disciples received Jesus into their threatening space in their boat.** We read in John 6:21, “Then they were glad to take Him into the boat.” Are we willing to do it on our own—to take Jesus into our marriage, our family, our parenting, our job, and into our health situations? Just this week as I was preparing this message, one of you men of God told me how you invited Jesus into your home as you dedicated every room in your home to the Lord. (4) **The disciples realized and found their assigned task was supernaturally completed when they gladly took Jesus into their boat.** We read in John 6:21, “and immediately, the boat was at the land to which they were going.”

I see shadows of confidence and trust we need here. I see these men straining at the oars—their limbs exhausted. But in seeing Jesus, they were looking at the One whose arms would be pulled out of joint, and His hands nailed to the cross for them, Here was God’s miracle within the miracle. When they invited Jesus into their boat, not fearing He was a ghost, what they had worked at all night was over. At the second Jesus was in the boat, the boat was at the shore. When we are straining at the oars and we face our last battle in life with death itself, and we gladly are trusting Jesus who jumps into our dying, takes us Home to Himself, to our eternal destination—absent from the body, at Home, at our eternal Capernaum with Jesus.