

The Perfect Storm

John 6:16-21

Every story is designed to reveal your dependency, exalt Christ's supremacy, and enrich you with sovereign joy.

LTS: John 17:6-26

If you are a follower of Jesus...

Every storm is designed to reveal your dependency, exalt Christ's supremacy and enrich you with sovereign joy.

Those of you who know me well, know that I love reading the stories of Christian heroes of the past. Their lives of faith are so profoundly inspiring. Whenever I read about men like Adoniram Judson, William Carey, or David Brainerd, Jonathan Edwards, Martin Luther and men like them, I always come away with a greater desire to become more faithful to the Lord. I have always thought that if I could just cultivate the kind of faith they had The Lord would surely use me to do more for His glory than I could ever have imagined.

But how exactly did those great men and women of church history become people of such profound trust in the Lord?

I can tell you it was not primarily by reading biography. **Rather it was largely through personal suffering.** Sometimes the only thing that can break through our faithless, sense of self-sufficiency is the fury of a **perfectly tailored storm designed by God to reveal our utter dependency upon Christ.**

This is exactly what the disciples of Jesus needed by the time we reach the account of Jesus walking on the water in **John 6**. Let's begin by reading this wonderful passage of Scripture.

Please stand with me in honor of God's word as I read.

Allow me to note here that the event about which we are going to read, took place immediately after Jesus fed somewhere in the neighborhood of 20,000 people with 5 small loaves and 2 small fish.

(V. 15) *So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to **make Him king**, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.*

(V. 16, 17) *Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea,¹⁷ and after getting into a boat, they started to cross the sea to Capernaum. It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.*

(V. 18, 19) *The sea began to be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing.¹⁹ Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were frightened.*

(V. 20, 21) *But He said to them, "It is I! Do not be afraid."²¹ So they were willing to receive Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.*

May the Lord ad His blessing to the reading of His word. You may be seated.

Little did the disciples realize when they finished eating the scraps left over from that banquet in the wilderness and stood upon the shore of Galilee, that the delightful experience of the evening was about to be **replaced** by an event **so terrifying** that they would truly doubt whether they would make it to shore with their lives. So, it seems appropriate to refer to this part of the narrative as...

I. The Calm Before the Storm (16-17)

1. It was evening and Jesus had just finished feeding the 5000. But rather than setting up camp for the night, he made His disciples get into a boat and cross over to the town of Capernaum. That makes sense when you realize that Capernaum is the home base of Jesus' ministry and the town in which Peter, James, and John were raised.
2. It may seem strange at first that Jesus would have sent His men off like that. It may have seemed to make better sense to keep the disciples close by, so they could take advantage of the ministry opportunities which this great miracle afforded. But **Jesus was resolute**. The disciples had to leave.
3. **Evidently**, Jesus had some trouble getting His men into the boat. In Mark's account it says *"Jesus MADE His disciples get into the boat"* This is a strong expression indicating **urgency** and **pressure**.
 - A. The Greek says Jesus **"forced"** or **"compelled"** his men to get into the boat. We can infer that the twelve were apparently **reluctant** to go.
 - B. Neither **Matthew**, **Mark**, nor **Luke** tells us why Jesus pressed them to go, but John tells us (6:15) that **the crowd intended to make Jesus King by force**.
4. **And from what we know about the disciples, they would have thrown their lot in with the crowd**. So, Jesus sent them away before any movement in that direction could get traction.
 - A. What I want you **to note here** is that Jesus made His men get into that boat even though He knew perfectly well that a storm was coming; a very difficult – **even life threatening** – trial.

- B.** I say He knew the storm was coming because He is God. In fact, the very truth he sought to establish in his disciple's hearts was that He is God, Creator of heaven and earth; by whose providential rule **all things** are God's instruments to bring Him glory.
- C.** And the storm that was coming toward the disciples that night was no exception
- D.** God said through His prophet, Isaiah, ¹*"I am the LORD and there is no other ... The One who forms light and creates darkness, causing well-being and **creating calamity**; I am the LORD who does all these."*
- E.** Now, I am fully aware of the fact that there are a number of men and women in our church body who find themselves in a fierce storm (and your pastor is one of them!). But I am here to tell you that whatever kind of storm you may be experiencing, its source is not bad luck or random happenstance. **No!** If you are a follower of Christ every storm you encounter is divinely purposed for you. It is for your good and the Glory of the One who made it.
- 5.** So, unlike the previous occasions when the disciples got into a boat, Jesus, **rather than going with His men**, chose to send them on their way **alone** and handle the crowds by Himself.
- 6.** So, after bidding the people farewell, Jesus took the opportunity to hike up the local mountainside to be alone for a few hours of prayer.
- 7.** We aren't told what Jesus prayed about that night but **considering what He had planned for the men He loved so dearly that evening**, you can be sure that **He prayed for them**.

¹ (Isa. 45:5-7)

- A. O church! I know that you are so faithful to pray for one another when a dangerous and frightening storm comes along, but do you know that your brothers and sisters in Christ are **NOT** the only ones praying for you? **The Son of God Himself** lifts you before the Father in your time of great need. He represents you heaven!
- B. Witness the fact that before Jesus' death He said to Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; **but I have prayed for you**, that your faith may not fail"² **And you know what? His faith didn't fail.** Peter persevered and became one of the great pillars of the church.
- C. **How does Jesus pray for you?** In **John 17**, we get a glimpse of what He asks of the Father on our behalf. He asks that the Father would
- **keep us in His name,**
 - **grant us fullness of joy,**
 - **safeguard us from the evil one,**
 - **sanctify us in the truth,**
 - **grant us unity with one another and Himself,**
 - **and permit us to see His glory.**
- D. **1 Tim. 2:5**, we learn that "there is one God and **one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.**"
- E. **Oh, what a comfort** to know that Jesus - who **created the storm** and set you upon its waves, now prays for you as you enter that storm. If you doubt that, you need but to read **Heb. 7:25** which reveals that **Christ our High Priest** **"always lives to make intercession for you."**

² (Lk. 22:31-32)

- F. So, as you face that severe trial on the job, or in your marriage, or with the kids, or failing health, - remember Christ has not forgotten you. He has promised to be with you. And **He is asking the Father to give to you things that are far more valuable than healing...**
- 1). Or when you are tempted to give into the gravitational pull of that same old temptation – remember, Christ is praying for you.
 - 2). When you fall into sin and you find yourself lying in a pool of your own guilt and shame – remember, your High Priest stands before the throne of God **like a lamb who was slain interceding for you.**
 - 3). **Oh, What a mighty support this is;** that Jesus Christ prays for you when you suffer. He is personally involved in the storm that He has created for your good. He desires to reveal to you...
 - the *depths of your dependency,*
 - the *height of His supremacy,* and
 - the *lengths to which He will go* to cause you to long for the fellowship of Christ and fill you with sovereign joy. And this is only **The Calm Before the Storm.**

Now John takes us **another** step into this narrative. Here the calm before the storm evaporates before...

II. Chaos in the Storm (18)

1. As Jesus continues to pray, the boat was reaching the middle of **the Sea of Galilee**. **Verse 19** tells us they were about **3 to 3 1/2 miles** out to sea.
2. In **v 48** of Mark we learn that **from the mountain, Jesus could see His men straining at the oars...** And the reason they were straining at the oars was because a wind had come up and was blowing **against them.**

3. In the middle of the storm, the disciples were rendered **helpless, alone** and **probably doomed**. After all, the last time they faced such a storm at sea Jesus was **in the boat** to rescue them. Now Jesus was far away and presumably unable to help. Despite the miracles He had performed and the divine power he manifested in previous miracles, it never occurred to them that Jesus could help them wherever they were. **They still did not think of Him as Almighty God.** Yes, they had a high view of **Jesus the man**, but they still did not comprehend his divine **supremacy!**

4. They needed to learn that Jesus was **NOT** merely a prophet and miracle-worker. He is **El Roi – The God who sees**. In **1 Peter 3:12, we read**, “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are attentive to their cries.” And Jesus Himself said that “Not a single sparrow falls to the ground without the Father’s care, and you (Jesus said) are worth more than many sparrows.”

5. The disciples needed to learn that no matter how bad things appear, **the Lord is your Keeper** who neither slumbers nor sleeps.

6. **Mark says** this scene was taking place during the fourth watch of the night.
 - A. The night was divided into four watches, or shifts. **The fourth watch was from 3 to 6am.** And usually concluded at dawn. It is likely, then, that the disciples had been straining at the oars for **seven to eight hours.** **Jesus waited a long time before He came to them,** just as He **waited** until Lazarus had been dead for 4 days before He came to Bethany. **In both instances** He could have come much sooner than He did, and **in both cases**, he could have performed the miracle without actually being physically present – just as He had done for **the Centurion’s** servant. But in His infinite wisdom, **He allowed those He loved to reach the extremity of their need before He came.**

B. The word “straining” here could be rendered **“tortured.”** Jesus’ men were experiencing not only physical pain from the work, but mental distress as well. Once again, they found themselves in a situation that was beyond them. They were **insufficient**. They were **helpless**. They were absolutely **dependent** upon the Lord. **And that is exactly where Jesus wanted them.** (I am the vine...).

7. Now let’s ask a relevant question at this point in the narrative? **How did these followers of Jesus get into this situation in the first place?** Ironically, the disciples were in this miserable trouble **because they obeyed Jesus.** **What a lesson for the church! Imagine what disobedience could have gotten those men that night:**

- perhaps a full stomach,
- a warm bed in someone’s home,
- an opportunity to dazzle their host with amazing stories of what it was like to live and minister with Jesus.

8. **It was obedience** that put them in such a dangerous and frightening situation. **What does that tell us? It tells us that God has a plan for our suffering.**

Adoniram Judson – missionary to Burma in the 1800’s whose suffering became the platform for His gospel ministry, said . . .

“If I had not felt certain that every additional trial was ordered by infinite love and mercy, I could not have survived my accumulated sufferings.”³

³ John Piper, audio biography of Adoniram Judson, *How Few There are Who Die so Hard*, (Desiring God, www.desiringgod.org/biography)

- A. If you submit your life to Christ in faithful obedience, you will expose yourself to a variety of sorrows. **Your Loyalty to Christ, your commitment to Biblical living, your hatred of sin and love of righteousness will make you vulnerable to things which the uncommitted soul will never experience.**
- B. Here is yet another mighty blow to **Prosperity Theology**. “**Name it - claim it!**” thinking just cannot be reconciled with what this text teaches about Jesus’ role in the believer’s suffering.
- C. **Listen, beloved:** The deepest joys of the Christian life do not come in the care-free absence of life’s storms, but in the uncontrollable hardships and troubles of God-ordained circumstances that bring you to the end of **self-sufficiency** so you can behold **Christ’s supremacy**.
- D. God is 10,000 times more committed to your **Christ-centeredness** than He is your **comfort**. Suffering is NOT a roadblock to your ministry. It is your ministry **so that there will be no missing the reality that *the all-surpassing power is from God and not men.***
9. **Oh, how the American church has missed this precious reality!** Perhaps the deepest problem in the American variety of Christianity in our day is that we have forgotten what life is all about. We have been tricked into believing that it is all about **us**, when in fact it is all about **God**. God’s purpose for creating humanity was **not** so humanity could be **self-fulfilled, healthy, and comfortable**, but so that God’s own infinite Person, character and worth would be glorified, exalted, and delighted in by us.
- A. The purpose of our existence is to live in such a way that **proclaims, upholds, and relishes** the glory of God, and invites all people everywhere to join us in the joyful worship of Jesus Christ. That’s what Jesus is doing in this text.

B. This passage is NOT about how you should **prepare** for trials or even how to **respond** to your trials. It is about **what God does** in and to you to you to so that the Person of Christ and His Gospel might be exalted.

So we have seen in this narrative

- the **Calm Before the Storm**
- **The Chaos in the Storm,**
- **But now John focuses on**

III. The Captain of the Storm

1. So in the middle of the Sea of Galilee that night, Jesus humbled his disciples with their **helpless inability** so they (**and we**) would behold His **supremacy**.
2. In **Job 9:8-11**, we read, "*He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea.*" Feeding the 5,000 was an impressive miracle but Jesus wanted His men to be absolutely convinced that He is "**very God of very God – Creator of the heavens and the earth** which he formed by the word of His power.
3. To accomplish this He had to do something shocking. He had to demonstrate that defying the universal laws of nature required Him to expend absolutely **ZERO effort**; that **He does as He pleases in the powers of heaven and the people of earth and no one can hold back his hand or say to Him, 'What have you done?'**
4. **The contrast between Jesus and His disciples is as is striking as it is intentional. Twelve men confined to a boat** are at the mercy of the wind and the waves- and **Jesus free from the need of a boat** exercising sovereign command over the wind and the waves.

5. **It is a vivid revelation of God's supremacy in bold relief against man's dependency and inability.**
6. **One of the specific ways Jesus accomplishes this in the story strikes me as somewhat comical.** For just a moment, turn with me to **Mark 6**. Look again at v. 48. Mark tells...

⁴⁸ *Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them.*

7. **Do you see it? Jesus intended to pass them** as he walked upon the water. Apparently, He caught up with **the boat** in the middle of the sea and **began walking past it almost as if He hadn't noticed His 12 closest friends bobbing in the waves!** I imagine him humming a tune as he passed by ("This Is The Day). **Why did He do that?** Why did he make it look like he was going to pass them? Why didn't He just walk right up and climb into the boat and take charge?
- A.** It strikes me that perhaps he wanted them to notice how absolutely care-free and unconcerned he was about *where He was and upon what He was standing.*
- B.** **He was no more afraid of what was under his feet than a child** standing on solid ground. He walked around in the middle of the lake outside that boat **as if water was what everybody walked on!** This Jesus is unbothered by the Chaos of the storm, because He is the **Captain of EVERY storm.**
8. **Verse 49** (Mark 6) we learn how the disciples responded. When they looked up and saw Him walking around on the waves, they immediately concluded what any superstitious Jewish fisherman would have thought; **it's a ghost!** And to make matters worse, the ghost was changing course

like a heat-seeking missile and was heading directly toward them. **No wonder Mark says they began to cry out.**

A. The Greek here literally says they “cried up” - or they screamed in terror.

9. When Jesus heard their screams, He called out to them, “**Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid!**” (v. 50)

A. Oh, can you imagine the relief they must have felt the moment they recognized His voice?

B. **John doesn’t tell us, but Matthew says as soon as Peter heard the Lord’s voice, He cried out for Jesus to bid him walk out to Him.** And, sure enough, Jesus called him out and Peter, too, walked on the water.

10. This account has always been a favorite story, especially among the children of the church. But Jesus orchestrated the whole thing to make a point. **He wanted His men to stop thinking of Him in shallow terms.** If they were going to be used to turn the world up-side-down after His resurrection, they would have to live with a deep and abiding sense of their own **dependency** and His absolute **supremacy** over all things.

11. Sometimes God plans storms in our lives that stretch us to the very limits we can handle in order that we might realize How utterly **dependent** we are upon His grace and How **supreme** He is over all circumstances.

12. So Jesus walks over to the boat with Peter in tow, climbed in with the other eleven. When He did, **the wind stopped immediately.**

13. How did the disciples respond to all of this? Mark says, “**They were utterly astonished!**” The Greek says **they “lost their senses exceedingly.”**

14. And why were they so astonished? Mark says (v. 52), “Because they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.”
15. **Think about that for a moment.** When Jesus multiplied the bread and the fish, and with it fed 5,000 people He did it in order to show His disciples His supremacy over the very fabric of creation. **By such power He would meet their every need and fulfill His every promise.** He wanted them to learn to **believe** in Him and **Trust** Him! But they didn’t get it.
16. They thought the banquet in the wilderness was a really neat miracle and they were probably excited about the whole experience, **but they didn’t get the point.** **Their hearts were hardened.** That is, they were insensitive to what Jesus was trying to teach them about Himself.
17. **What was he trying to teach them?** That He really is God in flesh, *and that **they must trust** Him implicitly in every circumstance without fear.*

Conclusion:

1. **My friends, we are so much like the disciples;** so slow to learn that Jesus is Almighty God.
2. But sometimes He brings into our lives something **so drastic** that we find ourselves compelled fall to the ground (as it were) **like Job** and say, **“I have heard of you with the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see you.”** And I repent in dust and ashes.
3. Beloved, we need to learn that Jesus is behind all your struggles. He rules over them entirely. He ordains them for your good. And He is determined to use them to reveal Himself to you in ways you have not yet known.
4. It would appear that the perfect storm broke through the disciples’ hardened hearts and achieved the desired result.

5. Matthew tells us an important fact that John leaves out. He writes: “And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat **worshipped Him**, saying, ‘**Truly you are the Son of God**’”⁴
6. **They got it! They got it!** And it changed them forever.
7. Are you facing some hard and frightening storm right now? Have you considered the possibility that perhaps **God has designed for you the perfect storm?** Have you considered the possibility that He is attempting to strengthen your Faith? **If you quit, you miss what He has for you.** So, stay at the oars of obedience. Persevere against the wind and waves. And wait for God to reveal Himself to you in ways you could never have known otherwise. He will do it, because He always does!
8. **Hudson Taylor** once wrote:
Not infrequently our God brings His people to difficulties *on purpose* that they may come to know Him as they could not otherwise do. Then He reveals Himself as ‘a very present help in trouble,’ and makes the heart glad indeed at each fresh revelation of a Father's faithfulness. We who only see so small a part of the sweet issue of trial often feel that we would not for anything have missed them; how much more shall we bless and magnify His name when all the hidden things are brought to light!”⁵
9. So, my dear brother or sister, don't give up. Stay at the oars. And remember...
- Every Trial you face is a Perfect Storm” and it is designed to reveal your dependency, exalt Christ’s supremacy and enrich you with sovereign joy.***

⁴ Mat. 14:32-32

⁵ (Hudson Taylor; p. 12).