

Responding to Life's Storms: Faith or Fear

In our NT reading, we see that Jesus leads his disciples to follow him to the other side of Lake Galilee. Exhausted from the day, Jesus falls asleep in the boat in which he and the disciples are journeying to the other side of the lake. Suddenly one of the infamous Galilee storms comes upon this little fishing vessel. In this "furious squall," ten-foot waves engulfed the boat, and the disciples began to fear for their lives.

I'll read **Mark 4:35-41**:

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side."³⁶ And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him.³⁷ A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"³⁹ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.⁴⁰ He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"⁴¹ And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

I wonder how I would have reacted to the storm had I been with Jesus and his disciples. Would I have responded with fear or with faith? I think you'll agree that we're living in a stormy time. Besides the storms of warfare and international terrorism, perhaps there are other storms raging or at least brewing in our lives. Our text forces us to ask, "How are we reacting?" Storms will come our way and into our lives. Will we react with faith or with fear?

Throughout Scripture the sea represents the perilous and that which is out of control. Life's storms will always threaten us. John and the other disciples could tell you that if you spend any time at all on Galilee you'll be in a storm. James, writing in his letter, didn't say, "If you face trials of many kinds," but rather he said, "whenever you face trials of many kinds" (James 1:2). Maybe your storms have to do with your or a loved-one's health. Maybe it's emotional, financial or relational. Sometimes the storm of life is when nothing at all seems to be happening for us, and we begin to think that life's opportunities are passing us by. You know your storms and maybe you alone know them. Maybe you can't discuss them with anyone.

Life's storms come suddenly and without warning. In Matthew's account of our text (Matthew 8:24) we read, "Without warning a furious storm came up." Imagine the fear in the hearts of these disciples! They viewed the waters as not only threatening but as an evil force, under the control of the enemy. They feared storms and the sea because they represented the demonic, the unknown, the uncontrollable, and the unwelcome.

The storms in your life will seem senseless also. Yet God is able to bring good out of evil. God is able to put sense into the storm. In our text Jesus knew a storm was coming. And, he directed the disciples to get into the boat, knowing it was headed into a storm. Yet, from the disciples' perspective, the storm meant the loss of not only their new venture with Jesus, but also the loss of their lives.

Right now the storm you are experiencing or facing probably makes no sense to you. You've worked hard to get where you are and now you have a pink slip that says you lost your job. You and your spouse always enjoyed good health, but now the doctor says otherwise. Maybe your storm isn't so much what's happened to you, but what hasn't happened, that is, your unfulfilled hopes. And often the timing of the storms seem senseless, when we're either already at the capacity of our endurance, along comes another storm, just like those on the East Coast are facing another winter storm.

And, as was the case with Jonah, the storms of our lives can be the result, the consequence of our disobedience. And because our God is a sovereign God of love and grace, he can and will deliver us from our self-induced problems, difficulties and storms. God loves his children, and if we won't return to him in the calm of life, he'll allow the storm as a wake-up call.

The disciples were in a storm because of their obedience. Jesus called them to join him in the boat headed for the storm. In his sovereign permission, God allows the storms that he can use in a redemptive, purposeful way, as part of his loving discipline in our lives. He uses storms to teach us to trust his love and care (2 Corinthians 12:9). The disciples' first response to the storm was fear. I'm not so sure my response would have been any different.

Fear is an initial response and an emotion. But faith is a decision. In the 53rd Psalm David said, "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I am not afraid; what can flesh do to me?" Notice, David didn't say, "If I am afraid," but rather, "When I am afraid." There are times when we find ourselves in the midst of a storm, either within ourselves or in our outward circumstances. At first, we're afraid. But when we consider our option, we can turn from fear to faith.

As these disciples learned to do, so we learn to place our faith in the Savior who is there for us. As David said, "Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; (Psalm 46:2). God is with us, even when health fails, a loved one dies, a job is lost or a child rebels.

As the old gospel song puts it,

"No waters can swallow the ship where lies,
The Master of ocean, and earth and skies."

Our son, Kyle, as a young boy had an obsession with monsters. When I would put him to bed, I'd do a ritual of chasing all monsters on the loose into his closet, shutting the door and commanding them to stay put for the night. Kyle thought I was bigger and stronger than any monster. If we but realized our God is bigger and stronger than any storm, that he's with us, our fear would become faith. He's bigger than our enemy nations, and he's bigger than whatever threatens you.

It's interesting that Jesus was asleep in the stern of the boat. He knew the storm was coming even as he fell asleep. Though asleep, he was still in control. What a vivid picture of the Master so in control of things that he can sleep! But the Father wasn't asleep. The Son trusted the Father completely and perfectly. Jesus knew that his heavenly Father was watching over him and his disciples, even though they were in a state of panic. The Son had inspired David to write in his psalm,

"He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep." (Psalm 121:3-4).

Luke's account of this event has the disciples calling Jesus "Master" (8:24). They realized they were in great danger and went to Jesus and woke him saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" "Master" is the same word that was used for ship captains.

Henry Blackaby grew up near the Pacific Coast in Canada, just south of Alaska. He was told by sailors that the time to get scared in a storm at sea is when the captain gets scared. As long as he is calm, you can afford to be calm.

You'll never find Jesus in a panic, because he's the Master, the Captain. He could trust himself and his disciples to the God who was watching over him. He inspired also these words of David:

"I will both lie down and sleep in peace;
for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety." (Psalm 4:8).

The disciples were amazed not only that Jesus could sleep in the storm, but also were dismayed that he didn't seem to care that they might drown. The disciples were rude to Jesus, to say the least. They awakened him and demanded, "Don't you care if we drown?" "Jesus, you're supposed to be in charge here, and are supposed to be keeping us away from storms. You're not being much of a leader," seemed to be what they were saying to Jesus.

That may be what we're saying about our storms going on right now. "Lord, you are supposed to at least show me that you care, even if you're not able to keep

me clear of the storms. But it seems you don't care that I'm drowning in my problems right now."

The truth is that Jesus is with us, and he cares and he is able to calm the storms. He also could have led us away from the storms, but he's more interested in our trusting him than in our being out of trouble. When our hearts are gripped with fear, it's difficult to be calm and in a sense of panic we may cry out rudely to God, something like, "Don't you care that I'm possibly going to lose my job? Or my health or my spouse' health? Or my marriage? Or my family?"

The Psalms are a great prayer and praise book that tells us it's OK to cry out to God, to raise a lament and even a complaint. God wants us to cry to him, even in our panic, fear, unbelief, or anger. But if we stand before this great God, we'll soon begin to realize his great patience with us based on his great love for us.

God loves us and accepts our fears that lead us to him. Then, as we, like the disciples, confess our unbelief in our cries of panic, he helps us to love and trust him. As he reveals himself in power and grace, we learn to place calm faith in him.

Faith is the gift that enables us to see things from God's point of view. When we can see the truth as it is in Jesus, we have a different perspective on life's storms. When we can see Jesus amidst life's storms, we are able to see his loving control of all things. Often, in our fear of the storm, we leave Jesus out of this simple equation: "The storm plus Jesus equals deliverance."

When Jesus is present, fear is illogical. The disciples cried out that they were going to drown. Was that logical? No, because Jesus was with them. The presence of Jesus changes the truth about our circumstances. Jesus had promised them that they were going to the other side of the lake. Jesus' commandments are always his enablements. He didn't promise an easy trip but he did give a guaranteed arrival (Wiersbe). My need and challenge is to practice the presence of Jesus.

That's exactly why Paul was unafraid when he was arrested and his life was in danger. The Lord had assured him that his mission and life's purpose was not yet over (Acts 23:11). When he was on board the ship to Rome, and a fierce storm threatened him and the other passengers, the Lord assured Paul that they would survive the storm because God's purpose was that he preach the gospel in Rome (Acts 27:23f).

You and I need to remember that our lives are indestructible until he is finished with our task in this mortal life. His will for us can't be frustrated by any threatening storms. When Jesus calmed the storm with a word, the disciples responded with awe. When Jesus calms our storms, we have a right kind of fear of him.

As a child, I stood in awe of my daddy and feared his discipline. Yet I never doubted his love for me. We can and must both fear and love God, and as we stand before him we realize we need fear nothing or no one else. Faith in God is a decision, and he is patient with us as we learn to fear him and trust in him.

The calming of this storm caused the disciples to worship the Lord Jesus in reverence and awe, and likely it led them to greater trust in him. Isn't it good news that we don't have to fear any approaching storm? I like the psalmist's words that the righteous person has no fear of bad news (Psalm 112:7). Storms are sure to come. Maybe you've seen the worst of them, and perhaps you haven't. We all face the last enemy, death. Our Lord Jesus is the Master of the storms.

CH Spurgeon said, "Fair weather faith is really no faith." Faith is trusting God in life's storms and through uncertain days.

Maybe as a believer we've been a practical atheist, living as though God doesn't exist. I remind you my fellow believers that we're called to be the Good Ship Dale Heights. It's not perfect, but Jesus is with us in the boat, and he's given us a task, our mission. I recall seeing fishing boats in the Holy Land, in a museum by the Lake of Galilee. They were rough, quite small little vessels, and no match for a furious storm. And Dale Heights is no match for the storms either. We must as never before put our total dependence and trust in Jesus, the Master of the wind and waves.

As I look at this living parable, I ask, "What is Jesus teaching me? How does he want me to join in this narrative?" I know he doesn't want me to doubt his wisdom, power and love in my life. This doubt is why Jesus rebuked the panicked disciples. They had doubted that he would or could save them from the storm and also that he cared for them. But he expected them to awaken him and implore him to act, even as I desperately tried to practice his presence in the wee hours this morning. I'm glad he invites us to come to him, to rouse him and say, "Master, Lord Jesus, deliver me!"