

The Miracles of Jesus

Miracle # 12

"Jesus Stills the Storm"(Mark 4:35-41, Matt 8:23-27, Luke 8:22-25)

In 1976 Gordon Lightfoot recorded a haunting ballad entitled "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald." [1976, Moose Music, Ltd.] The Edmund Fitzgerald was a real ship and Lightfoot's song is a tribute to the shipwreck and the men who lost their lives.

The Edmund Fitzgerald was a giant ore freighter 729 feet in length and was the largest carrier on the Great Lakes from 1958 until 1971. The Fitzgerald was labeled "the pride of the America Flag." On November 10, 1975 the Fitzgerald was hauling a heavy load of ore to Detroit, Michigan when it ran into a severe storm. This storm generated 27-30 ft. waves with a following sea. During the evening hours the ship disappeared from radar screens, apparently it sank in a matter of minutes. It now rests on the bottom of Lake Superior broken in two with the bow upright and the stern upside down still loaded with its cargo of ore and all 29 hands.

It is a fact of nature that the inland waters possess a special kind of treachery. Sometimes due to geography the inland water ways are more subject to violent changes of weather.

Although the Sea of Galilee is only 5 miles wide and 13 miles long it has a history of terrible storms. The fact is that the Sea of Galilee is 600 ft. below sea level, and great storms develop when the cold air and warm air meet in this natural basin.

Such a situation was developing as the disciples set out across the Sea of Galilee after Jesus had finished speaking.

The miracle of stilling the storm is found in all three of the synoptic gospels (synoptic - meaning to see the **same way**, and refers to Matthew, Mark and Luke, all of which approach the telling of the life Jesus is similar ways.)

Mark 4:35-41

"On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." (36) Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. (37) And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. (38) But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that

we are perishing?" (39) Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. (40) But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" (41) And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

Matthew 8:23-27

"Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. (24) And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. (25) Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" (26) But He said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. (27) So the men marveled, saying, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"

Luke 8:22-25

"Now it happened, on a certain day, that He got into a boat with His disciples. And He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side of the lake." And they launched out. (23) But as they sailed He fell asleep. And a wind-storm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water, and were in jeopardy. (24) And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!"

Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm. (25) But He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and marveled, saying to one another, "Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!"

The Background of the Miracle (Luke 8:22)

"Now it happened, on a certain day, that He got into a boat with His disciples. And He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side of the lake." And they launched out."

After a long day of ministry, which had included confrontations with religious leaders and continued with teaching amidst the press of immense crowds, Jesus was exhausted. So as the day drew to a close Jesus having obtained a boat to cross the lake, moved to the stern of the boat where he wearily collapsed into a deep sleep. The disciples in obedience to his command hoisted the sail and began the five mile trip across the lake with a flotilla of admirers in their boats following (Mark v. 36).

When very unexpectedly and seemingly

without **warning**, they were in the midst of a terrible storm. Matthew uses the word **seismos** (literally **earthquake**) to describe the storm. This was no ordinary breeze blowing - this was like a hurricane! Luke writes here that the storm was so bad that the ship was full of water. Mark wrote in his account of this story that the waves were beating the ship that it was full of water. Matthew in his account said that the waves covered the ship. So, you see that this was one serious storm that was going on. They had a crisis on their hands. The ship was full of water, the waves were as high as the boat and they were headed for the bottom of the sea unless the storm ceased.

The Elements of the Miracle (Lk 8:23-24)

"Now it happened, on a certain day, that He got into a boat with His disciples. And He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side of the lake." And they launched out. (23) But as they sailed He fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water, and were in jeopardy."

As one sits in an air conditioned and comfortable auditorium it is easy to think good thoughts about the world outside. But you know how life is; there can be and probably will be darker, more difficult days than this.

But this story in the life of Jesus and His disciples, in the boat upon the sea, conveys another world, a world where storms rise up out of nowhere and life itself is put at peril. If you have ever suffered from a life threatening disease then you know that world. The once placid lake of our life becomes a storm tossed, angry, raging sea. This is a story about that.

When the physician comes back with a bad report or when you are startled in the night by a late telephone call and the voice on the other end says, "**I am afraid I have some bad news!**" Then the waves begin to beat and the boat seems as if it is sinking and you cry out, "**Lord do you not care that we are perishing?**"

The whole point of the story and of the parable is that storms happen. The Bible reveals different times when storms come in our lives.

- (1) When we are **running** from God's will
– Jonah.
- (2) When we have an attitude of **unbelief** – Zechariah. (Luke 1:20)
- (3) When we have **unconfessed** sin –
Ananias and Sapphira. (Acts 5)

An analysis of the storms in our lives reveals that sometimes they are brought on by our own stupidity or our **sin**. Sometimes they are caused by ones own bad **decisions**. They may be caused by the actions of someone else.

At times they just seem to happen and we have no idea why. But no matter what storms come up in our life, we can call upon Jesus.

James tells us the purpose of trials is to test and deepen our faith. James 1:2-3, tells us in (1:2-3) "Dear Brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything" (NLT).

Perhaps you thought or had been taught that life would be smooth sailing with Jesus in your life. You thought with Jesus in the boat, there would be no storm, no unmanageable waves and no fear. No, that is just not true. And if you have lived very long you know that it is not true, based on your own experience. But perhaps you thought, "**Then there must be something wrong with me!**" The truth is that Jesus does not teach this or promise this. "Even when believers follow Christ's bidding, they may face hardships. For example, Jesus' disciples were doing God's will when they took Him across the lake, for he had commanded them to do so. Yet they were buffeted by a dreadful tempest, and they seemed to be in danger of drowning. A storm - and Christ on board! It seems a contradiction. Wouldn't His presence ensure a peaceful journey? Not at all!" [Our Daily Bread, Feb. 16]

You can find a storm and be right in the center of God's will. The disciples did. Notice that the disciples were in the midst of a storm not because they had disobeyed, but because they had obeyed. Needless fears beset the disciples because they did not trust Jesus words. If they had just thought for a moment, they would have remembered that he had said, in verse twenty-two, "Let us cross over to the other side of the lake." He said "**Lets go over to the other side.**" He didn't say, "**Let us go to the middle of the lake and be drowned.**" They had no need to fear when they were with Him, they were obeying Him and He had revealed His intention to be on the other side of the lake. Jesus had a plan. They should have been saying to the raging waves as the old hymn so eloquently says, "**No water can swallow the ship wherein is the master of Ocean and Earth and Sky!**" [Peace be Still. Horatio Spafford]

Even though the disciples had no way of knowing it during those terrible moments, that storm was divinely appointed vehicle to teach them about God and his power in their lives. Without difficulties, without trials, without stresses and even failures, we would never grow to be what the Lord wants us to become. Without adversity, we would be insufferably self-centered, proud, one-dimensional and empty people. Faith must be tested before it can be trusted.

Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a pillow

The parallel account in Mark 4:38 tells us that Jesus "... was in the stern, asleep on a pillow:" Although in just a few moments he would calm the storm with extraordinary display of divine power, at this moment he slept in a weary human body. To the disciples, however, he seemed **unaware** or **unconcerned** about their plight. Does Jesus know? Does He care? Or as Gordon Lightfoot says in his ballad of the Edmund Fitzgerald, "Does anyone know where the love of God goes When the waves turn the minutes into hours." We mistakenly conclude that we are alone, that no one, not even God, knows what is happening in our lives and how we are feeling.

While these seasoned sailors were panicking because of the intensity of this storm Jesus was fast asleep. He was asleep seemingly unconcerned, quite detached and indifferent to their plight. Isn't it true that we feel like that too at times? When we are in the midst of a crisis of one form or another and it seems that Jesus doesn't care, He just does not seem to be interested or concerned with what we are going through.

God has never promised our lives would be empty of pain, disappointment, or storms. Anyone who tells you otherwise is not teaching the truth of the Bible. What God does promise is **resources** to journey through the raging waters. The fact is that Jesus was right there with them in the ship, facing the same storm.

"Lord, save us we are perishing" (v. 24)

Soaked and no doubt shivering, terrified to the core, the men had strained to keep the boat headed into the wind. They just knew that the next wave would take them to the bottom. In a near state of panic the disciple approached the sleeping Jesus in the stern of the boat, shouting to be heard above the wind.

As to what they said, their words differ slightly from one gospel account to another. Matthew records that the disciples cry out, "Lord, save us we are perishing" (8:25) which seems to be a cry for **help**. In Luke the disciples are recorded as having said, "Master, Master, we are perishing" (8:24) seems to be a statement of eminent **doom**. In Mark the record is that they say, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing." (4:38) which seems to be a **rebuke** of Jesus lack of action. I believe all of those things were said and probably more.

Faith was paralyzed by **fear**. Fear is like an anchor it stops us dead in the water. They were afraid that all of them, including Jesus, would die. There were of course, wrong, but so are we when we panic during difficult times. In reality their problem was not the storm around them but the **unbelief** within them. Their made too much of the problem and too little of God's provision. Fear does that, in that it maximizes the problem and minimizes God's

provision and presence. Fear is forgetting who Jesus is. Fear is forgetting that Jesus is in charge.

To cry out is to assume that there is a God who cares and who not only cares but acts. The Deist assumed that God created the world, set certain processes in motion, then absconded, leaving us to our own devices. Storms at sea? Sorry, there are certain natural laws which have been established, certain climatic processes, and when they converge, there are storms. Nothing can be done about it. I am so glad I serve the God of the Universe who not only created everything that is, is not limited as to He can act by His own creation.

The Psalmist says in (Psalms 107:24-30) "They see the works of the LORD, And His wonders in the deep. (25) For He commands and raises the stormy wind, Which lifts up the waves of the sea. (26) They mount up to the heavens, They go down again to the depths; Their soul melts because of trouble. (27) They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, And are at their wits' end. (28) Then they cry out to the LORD in their trouble, And He brings them out of their distresses. (29) He calms the storm, So that its waves are still. (30) Then they are glad because they are quiet; So He guides them to their desired haven."

As the great old hymn says so well,
"When darkness veils his lovely face, I rest on His unchanging grace, In every high and stormy gale My anchor holds within the veil."

There is a true story of how the storms of life washed ruthlessly over one man named Horatio Spafford. Some months prior to the great Chicago fire in 1871 he had invested heavily in property on the shore of Lake Michigan but his holdings were wiped out by the disastrous fire. Just shortly before this he had experienced the death of his son. Desiring a break from all the stress for his wife and daughters and wishing to join and assist D.L. Moody and Sankey in their evangelistic crusades in Great Britain, Spafford planned a European trip for his family. In November of 1873, due to last minute business developments he had to remain in Chicago, but he sent his wife and girls on ahead as scheduled. He expected to follow in a few days.

On November 22 the ship was struck by another vessel and sank in 12 minutes. Several days later the survivors were finally landed in Wales. Mrs. Spafford immediately cabled her husband just two words, "Saved alone." Shortly thereafter Spafford left to join his wife. It is speculated that on the sea near the area where it was thought his four daughters had drowned he penned these words which describe both his grief and his faith. "When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul." [Kenneth W. Osbeck. 101 Hymn Stories. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Pub., 1997.)

The Effect of the Miracle

The Waves Obey His Voice. (v. 24)

“Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm.”

Jesus who is unconcerned about the storm, the wind, the waves and the raging sea; is concerned about his frightened disciples, the ones who have ventured forth in the boat. The storm was necessary for the spiritual development of the disciples, and so was the ensuing calm that was about to come. At their cry, He rouses himself, rebukes the waves and the wind, and there is immediate calm. Jesus cares, not only cares, but acts and saves.

But one has to wonder if the reason that Jesus waited so long to calm the storm was because it took the disciples so long to call upon him.

I want you to notice with me some significant characteristics of how easily Jesus over came the storm. First, notice that Jesus by a word of command brings the forces of **nature** into subjection to Himself. He speaks and it is done. Secondly, notice how **effectively** it was done - **“there was a great calm.”** All three gospels speak of a sudden and miraculous calm. In reality this is the second miracle. Normally considerable time is required for the waves to subside, even though the winds may have long since diminished. This storm did not merely cease and the winds gradually return to normal. He spoke and it was if there had never been a storm!

Some have argued that Jesus did not calm the storm he simply calmed the fears of the disciples. Although it is true as the contemporary song suggest **“sometimes he calms the sea and sometimes He calms his child,”** in this instance he calmed the sea in order that he might strengthen the faith of his disciples.

The Disciples Are Afraid (v. 25a)

Dazed the disciples looked around trying to understand what was happening. Their fear of the storm was replaced by a new fear. In the story as it is told in Mark he uses two different Greek words to describe the fear of the disciples. When the storm came upon them Mark says, **“They were afraid.”** But after Jesus stilled the wind and the waves he says that **“they feared exceedingly.”** (4:41). Their fear at what Jesus had done differs in both kind and in intensity from that which they had as a result of the storm. What Jesus has done was even more startling than the life-threatening storm itself. The story begins with the disciples terrorized by the winds and the waves. The story ends with the disciples terrorized by the intervention of

Jesus. The disciples were awe-struck at this new revelation of the power of their master.

Luke tells us that Jesus turned from rebuking the storm to rebuke his disciples saying, (v. 25) **"Where is your faith?"** Jesus is asking His disciples, **"why are you so fearful and living as if you have no faith?"** He was rebuking them for their **fearfulness** and their lack of **faith**. There is perhaps a little irony in the fact that the storm did not disturb Jesus but the **unbelief** of his disciples did. Although their fear was natural, they had no excuse for their lack of faith. Fear comes and all reasons for trust depart – all our experiences of how God has worked in the past in our lives.

The ease with which the Lord calmed the storm led to the disciples marveling and, **"... saying to one another, "Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!"** (Luke 8:35)

The answer to their question **"Who can this be?"** was answered long ago in the word of God. Psalms 89:8-9 say, **"O Lord of hosts, Who is mighty like You, O LORD? Your faithfulness also surrounds You. (9) You rule the raging of the sea; When its waves rise, You still them."**

Conclusion

In the lives of the disciple's the absence or presence of faith was revealed in the trauma's of life. So it is with us as well. Where is our faith during the storms of life? It is the **crises** of life which reveals our faith. It is at such times that we face a three-fold challenge, to **worry**, to **work** or to **trust**. When difficulties come we can choose to worry, but we all know deep down that changes nothing. When faced with adversity we can try harder, and harder until we see that there is nothing more we can do and we are forced to conclude that it is absolute out of our control. Or we can in faith fall before the Lord and ask for his help. Peter invites us in (1 Peter 5:7) **"Let him have all your worries and cares, for he is always thinking of you and watching everything that concerns you."** (The Living Bible). Jesus longs for us to put or trust in Him – the only One who can take us through the storm - not around, not over, but through.

Application

Whatever your problems may be this evening, what you need to do is sit still and listen to God's voice. Jesus spoke and commanded the winds to cease, and I believe that Jesus will speak to our problems, if we will sit still long enough and listen. People say, "God doesn't care about me, he doesn't care that I am going through such a hard time, he doesn't care." Well, I believe that God is still speaking, if we will stop and listen.

Max Lucado says in his book "A Gentle Thunder: Hearing God Through A Storm,"

“Once there was a man who dared God to speak.

Burn the bush like you did for Moses, God. And I will follow.

Collapse the walls like you did for Joshua, God. And I will fight.

Still the waves like you did on Galilee, God.

And I will listen.

And so the man sat by a bush, near a wall, close to the sea and waited for God to speak.

And God heard the man, so God answered.

He sent fire, not for a bush, but for a church.

He brought down a wall, not of brick, but of sin.

He stilled the storm, not of the sea, but of a soul.

And God waited for man to respond.

And he waited. . . And he waited. . .

And waited.

But because the man was looking at bushes, not hearts; bricks and not lives, seas and not souls, he decided that God had done nothing.

Finally he looked to God and asked, ‘Have you lost your power?’ And God looked at him and said, ‘Have you lost your hearing?’ [Max Lucado, “A Gentle

Thunder: Hearing God Through A Storm.” (Dallas: Word, 1995) p. 9]