

Master of the Storm

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Date: 14 May 2023

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[0 : 0 0] Let's pray. Father, I pray that you would speak to us this morning. I pray that you would again lift our eyes so that we can have the scales fall from them and to behold you as you truly are and to hang on to you as a result.

So by your spirit, please be at work this morning. We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen. James Dobson, the founder of Focus on the Family, once told this story of a man who was driving his truck along a narrow mountain road.

As he rounded a curve, he suddenly lost control of his vehicle, which plunged over a 500-foot cliff and burst into flames. However, the man himself, having been flung out of the truck, managed to grab onto a branch of a bush growing near the top.

After trying to pull himself up for several minutes, he cried out in desperation, Is anybody there?

Immediately, the voice of the Lord thundered back.

Yes, I'm here. What do you want? The man pleaded, Please save me. I can't hold on much longer.

There was an agonising pause, and then the voice said, Sure, I'll save you.

[1 : 2 6] Just let go of the branch. Release your grip. My hands will be under you to catch you. The man looked over his shoulder at the burning truck in the valley below, and then he cried out, Is anybody else there?

Now, it's a somewhat humorous story, and almost certainly a work of fiction, but it does illustrate our somewhat complicated relationship with God sometimes, doesn't it?

I take it that the majority of the people in this hall this morning are Christians. You do know Jesus. You want to turn to him. You want to follow him and trust him.

In short, you're no different from the disciples in Luke's Gospel. But sometimes you find it hard to do so. As you follow him, you find yourself sometimes wondering who this person you say you follow really is, especially when he leads you onto unexpected paths.

And so sometimes you'll find yourself turning away from him and asking, Is anybody else there?

And that is especially true when times are tough.

[2 : 4 4] It's easy to have faith when the friends are there, the bills are paid, the grades are good, the sun is shining. But when a diagnosis suddenly appears, the friends disappear, when nothing is working and the dark clouds are gathering, that that's when we have to confront the question, Who is Jesus really to me?

And this is where today's passage comes in. Last week, Jesus gave us some pointed teaching about what kind of response he's looking for. He's looking for a faith that bears fruit.

But perhaps that causes us to ask, How can we have a fruit-bearing faith? Well, for the rest of Luke 8, including our passage this morning, he will help us to see that when we look to him, we will have faith.

When we know, not just in our heads, but in our hearts, who Jesus is, we won't go looking for anyone else.

And so let's get into this little episode. It's only four verses long. And firstly, examine the circumstances that sets everything into motion. Verse 22.

[4 : 0 5] Jesus, as always, is with his followers, and he has a simple request. Let's go over to the other side of the lake. And so the disciples do it.

They get into a boat and set up. Just an ordinary day, doing pretty ordinary stuff. But don't be too quick to rush over this verse.

Because as we all know, Jesus is never random. Nothing ever happens by accident with him. So think about it. Notice that it is Jesus who initiates the journey here.

And until the storm hits, notice that he then doesn't initiate anything else. He's not active. And notice something else.

Notice that it is precisely the readiness of the disciples to follow Jesus' lead that gets them into the subsequent storm.

[5 : 08] Something that's very obvious, one stated, but easily overlooked, if not. And that already provides us with one important theological lesson, doesn't it?

Following Jesus doesn't mean that you will never run into a storm. In fact, it's the opposite.

Following Jesus means often you will head into storms.

Jesus will make that even clearer later on in Luke 9, where he will talk about how following him means taking up your cross. It's part and parcel of following Jesus.

Now, in our city, there is another message that sometimes makes its way around. I imagine that this year, some preachers passing through Kuching will bring this message.

Now, this message will also call itself the Gospel and claim to be Christian teaching. And this message says this. Follow Jesus and everything will get easier.

[6 : 10] Follow Jesus and get a financial windfall. Or if not, get at least a healthy body, a thriving family, a chance to be always happy right here, right now.

And I can see why such a message would appeal. It's not necessarily because everyone wants to become the next Elon Musk or Robert Kwok. It's because sometimes we just want relief.

Life is hard. Family can be difficult. My body doesn't always behave the way I want it to. And wouldn't it be nice to know if I just believe the right things and did the right actions with enough sincerity, I'll automatically be rewarded with some comfort.

Such a message is simple to understand. Have faith, follow Jesus, and in return get rewarded now. But Jesus complicates that.

Here, as elsewhere in the Bible, he leads us into difficulty. He doesn't automatically take us out of it. And when you hear that, you might think, okay, that's not what I want.

[7 : 29] If I'm going to follow some God, surely the point is to make life easy for me? If not, then Jesus, why bother with you? But if that's you, then let me invite you to keep hearing the story.

Jesus and his disciples are now out on the lake, sometimes known as the Sea of Galilee. And let me tell you a little bit about this lake. It's 682 feet below sea level with mountains to the east and some valleys on the western side.

It's quite pretty. And I'm told that to this day, it's still got a good supply of fish. It still provides good nutrients to the surrounding soil. Perhaps those of you who have been to the land of Israel can confirm that with me.

So on the face of it, it can look like one of those postcard perfect pictures you see on tourist brochures. But its location also means that sudden and violent storms can arise as the cold air from the surrounding mountains and the warm air arising from the surface of the lake meet one another. And that's exactly what happens. The story now draws us in to feel the crisis. Things are looking peaceful.

[8 : 55] Peaceful enough for its most famous passenger to fall asleep. And then all of a sudden a storm appears. There's no build-up. There's no ominous dark clouds.

You see, what is happening here is a windstorm rather than a thunderstorm. We usually think of storms as being accompanied by rain and dark skies, thunder and lightning.

So, it is not surprising if that is the way we visualize what is happening here. But, if the storms were rain or thunderstorms, the experienced fishermen on this boat would surely have recognized the developing rain clouds and the impending threat, they would have headed for shelter in one of the surrounding harbors.

The way it suddenly appears is more consistent with a windstorm. And this is confirmed by the wording Luke uses. The NIV in verse 23 describes it as a squaw.

And in the original Greek language, it is literally described as a windstorm of wind. So, out of nowhere, the wind suddenly picks up greatly.

[10 : 11] And that's how life sometimes develops, doesn't it? Everything is going on as normal, nothing looks out of the ordinary, then boom!

Suddenly, you faint unexpectedly. Suddenly, you lose your job. Suddenly, people become more hostile to your Christian faith. you don't get a notification on your phone saying, oh, by the way, next week, a crisis will appear in your life.

Your activation code is John 316 for your security, use it now. No. They just happen without warning. The wind suddenly picks up greatly.

And such storms can be very scary, can't they? I heard someone once suggest that storms at sea are scarier than storms on land because the very thing that brings us assurance and security, the land itself, is not there.

The ground beneath our feet feels less stable because it literally tosses us about. And sometimes things hit us and the things we reach out to stabilize ourselves, they're not there.

[11 : 26] The friends we reach out to, they're not there. the family we reach out to, they're not there. The money that can usually purchase lots of stuff, they're not there.

Maybe even the alcohol or whatever you use to soothe yourself, they're not there. And maybe we're like that man hanging on a branch in the James Dobson story, crying, is anybody there?

And this is a life-threatening crisis. In verse 23, the boat was being swamped, meaning that the water was fast pouring in.

I got a vivid picture of what that might look like a few months ago when the flood barriers of our church were breached and the water just started gushing in like a waterfall. And Luke makes plain the stakes for us at the end of verse 23.

He objectively states, and they were in great danger. This is an emergency and these experienced fishermen know it and put yourself in their shoes.

[12 : 38] You see, as Israelites, seawater has great symbolic meaning for them. They are a threat because the sea stands for disorder and chaos.

In Job 38, verse 8 to 11, the sea is something that has to be shut in and constrained by God to prevent it from bursting forth. In the Old Testament, the sea is where there are dangerous sea creatures and it's something that brings destruction.

Just think of the flood during Noah's time sweeping everything away. And so the sea is something scary for the Israelites. So no wonder so often the psalmist invokes the deep image, the image of the deep waters to describe the troubles and the terrors they feel.

Look at Psalm 69, verse 1 and 2 for example. Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sing in the miry depths where there is no foothold.

I have come into the deep waters, the floods engulfed me. And right now, in that very boat, that must be what the disciples are feeling.

[13 : 56] The waters are rising, their foothold is disappearing, there is chaos, there is disorder. They are busy trying to scoop water out of the boat, but of course that is futile.

Have you ever known a time like that? A time where you are just fighting to keep yourself above water? A time where you are starting to panic and you are wondering whether anything will ever be normal ever again?

And I wonder if the disciples are not just experiencing Psalm 69, verses 1 and 2, but also verse 3 as well. Here is Psalm 69, verse 3. I am worn out, calling for help.

My throat is parched, my eyes fail, looking for my God. You see, interestingly, it's true that in this story, in Luke, we are not told the disciples prayed to God.

Now, you would have thought that would be a natural instinct for them. remember the pagan sailors in Jonah, who also experienced a great storm? They're desperate enough that they thought crying out to any God would be good.

[15 : 11] But these disciples here don't seem to pray. But, interestingly, what they do is verse 24. They go looking for Jesus.

So, it seems to me that they are looking for help from someone bigger than themselves. And their instinct tells them that means to go look for Jesus.

Now, one scholar disputes this because he says all they tell Jesus is we're drowning, not do something, as if they go to him simply to complain, not to cry for help.

But it seems to me that by saying, Jesus, we're drowning, the disciples are clearly implying, so do something.

Certainly, when Luke's fellow disciple, Matthew tells this story that's made clear. And so, they're crying and looking for help from Jesus. And I imagine that's what we'll do too when we're in their shoes.

[16 : 17] But when they find Jesus, what's he doing? Sleeping. And I think that image of Jesus sleeping perfectly captures the paradox of who he is, doesn't it?

On the one hand, does anything showcase his humanity more? He's probably had quite a few long weeks teaching and preaching, and so he must be tired.

And looking forward to a nap. Like any other human being, he needs sleep. And yet, does this also not showcase he is not just human?

After all, if you're on a plane that is experiencing severe turbulence and it feels like it might actually crash, you probably wouldn't be sleeping. nothing. But here is Jesus getting some shot-eye even when the boat is rocking and the water is coming in.

Jesus always confounds our imagination, doesn't he? He never seems to be doing what we expect him to. Perhaps right now life is pretty rocky for you, and you're looking to Jesus to bring some order out of your chaos.

[17 : 41] But he doesn't seem to help you according to our typical human strategies. You expect instant healing as the obvious solution to your problem.

But no, that's not how Jesus acts. You expect instantly well-behaved children as what will resolve your parenting woes. But no, that's not what Jesus gives you.

And you start asking, Jesus, who are you? Who in the world am I following? And actually, that's where Jesus wants us.

He wants us to go beyond our surface issues and to really wrestle with that question, who is he? For that is the culmination of this little story.

So now, let's grasp the culmination. Now, remember earlier I said that Jesus is the one who sets things into motion in verse 22. He's the one who initiates this journey.

[18 : 48] But notice since then, he's done nothing. It's the disciples who are sailing, it's the disciples who are waking him, it's the disciples who are crying out. And the disciples, I'm sure, also did a lot more that is not recorded as they tried whatever they could to save themselves.

But clearly, nothing works. Not even their experience can save them. So the disciples do everything but come up with nothing.

But now Jesus awakes. And finally, he is actively doing something again. verse 24. He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters, the storm subsided, and all was calm.

Once again, all he does is say the word. Like he did for the centurion servant. Like he did for the widow and her dead son. Like he did for Peter's mother-in-law way back in chapter 4.

Once again, Luke wants to make the point. Jesus' word is absolutely authoritative. It is totally effective. It is not at all defective.

[20 : 05] Notice here how there is instantaneous calm. That's not how wind storms normally die down. You don't go from winds blowing at over 100 kilometers per hour to nothing in the space of less than five seconds.

And upon seeing that, do the disciples find relief? not exactly. You have thought they'll be happy, they'll be jumping for joy, but nope.

They're still fearful, verse 25, because now they have something new to be afraid of. If the storm was scary, it makes sense anyone who can master the storm is scarier still.

who is this? He commands even the winds and the water and they obey him. You see, that's where this episode is really going.

That's the culmination. As I hope you're beginning to realize, often in the Gospels, Jesus' miracles themselves are not the main show.

[21 : 22] They're the signposts. signposts. And when Jesus calms the storm, he's not merely demonstrating his raw power. Instead, Jesus is using his authority to draw our attention to something more fundamental, his very identity.

Who is he? Well, let's flip back to the Psalms and let the jigsaw pieces slowly come together. Now, here is Psalm 89, verse 9 on the screen.

You, that's God, rule over the surging sea. When its waves mount up, you steal them. Or Psalm 107, verse 29, he, God, steal the storm to a whisper.

The waves of the sea were harsh. You see, there's only one person in the entire universe who can command the wind and the waves. And the disciples know that.

And so, they're slowly trying to get their heads around this. Could it be that very person who is right now in our boat, who is standing right next to us, could he be God himself?

[22 : 39] Could he be the God of the Psalms? You see, this is possibly the most important question you could ever ask.

Right now, it seems to me that the big question many of us ask in the 21st century is this. Who am I? What's my identity? But the scripture says, stop being so full of yourselves.

Ironically, if you just ask that, you'll never find out who you are. actually, there's a more important question to ask first. Who is Jesus?

Because if Jesus steals the seas, that means he's the God of Psalm 65 verse 5 to 8. Well, see what it says on the screen. You'll answer us with awesome and righteous deeds.

God our saviour, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the further seas, who form the mountains by your power, having armed yourself with strength, who steal the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the turmoil of the nations.

[23 : 53] The whole earth is filled with all at your wonders, where morning dawns, where evening fades, you call forth songs of joy. If this is who Jesus is, if this is indeed his identity, then it is truly good news.

Because the one who steals the seas is the hope of all the earth. The one who silences the waves is in charge of the entire created order.

He can do awesome and righteous deeds. He calls forth songs of joy. He's the same God who controlled the Red Sea in such a way as to lead his people through them and to redeem them.

And he is now here on earth, in Christ. ready to do the same thing in greater form all over again. It's not just Egypt this time.

He's going to steal the turmoil of the nations. He is God, our saviour. And get this. He's the God we presently follow.

[25 : 02] And that is what this is all about. This is the culmination. This episode is not in look to tell us there will be no storms in our lives.

We've seen that already. It's not even in look to tell us that God will necessarily stop every ongoing storm. After all, the apostle Peter himself, who is on this very boat, will go on to be persecuted and crucified.

He doesn't get a healthy body or become happy right here, right now. But this story is here so that we know who Jesus is and not just that, but also why we follow him and no one else, no matter what.

God puts us through storms to make us realise the worth of the anchor. God puts us through storms to show us who is master.

For who is this master? He is the one who deliberately walks into his storm. In the middle of Luke chapter 9, Jesus will ask Peter, who am I to you?

[26 : 26] And Peter correctly answers, you are the Christ. But then Jesus once again confuses his disciples. he says to Peter, you're correct.

But then he goes on to say, by the way, I'm not here to dazzle you with displays of earthly power. I'm here to give my life as a ransom for sinners. witness. And so in obedience to the father, he sets the ball rolling on another journey, the journey to Jerusalem.

And once he gets there, he deliberately starts moving towards the cross. His disciples fall asleep, he remains awake.

and when he is hung up on the cross, he cries, not for God's help, but, why Lord, have you forsaken me? And chaos seems to have the last word because Jesus is now not just asleep, he's dead.

But Jesus says that is not the end of the story. This story ends in resurrection, hope. Jesus rises from the dead. And that means all those who follow him, all those who are in him, will have the same ending too.

[27 : 51] No matter what kind of storms we're in today, even life-threatening ones, our stories end in resurrection, hope. Our stories end with healthy bodies as we become part of God's thriving family and become unceasingly happy.

and sometimes Jesus lets storms persist in our lives so that this resurrection hope becomes our only hope and nothing else.

As the Apostle Paul says elsewhere, who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

in our storms, we can wait because in Christ, glory lies at the end of our suffering.

In Christ, the crucified life is the resurrected life. Answer today. Here's the follow-up question.

[28 : 59] Where is your faith? your faith? Where is your faith? That is the question of verse 24 and that is the question Jesus asks us.

Now, Jesus isn't questioning whether we even acknowledge him. Remember, the disciples woke him up crying, Master, Master, they have the beginnings of faith.

That's probably many of us as well. But Jesus is asking them, and us, in the face of storms, how does your faith hold up?

Is it going to hold up? Or will it be like the rocks or taunts of last week? And to hold up our faith, Jesus says don't look inside yourselves.

Don't try to bolster it with your own willpower or something like that. That is not going to work. Hold up your faith by knowing and remembering who Jesus is.

[30 : 05] The anchor in the storm, the hope through the storm, the master of the storm. And here is an encouragement. Did you notice how Jesus wakes up?

It wasn't the storm that woke him up. The storm didn't bother him. but it was the Christ of his people. The people whom he just pinpointed as having little faith.

And yet Jesus came to their aid anyway. You see, Jesus doesn't come to us on the basis of how strong and mature a Christian we are. That's not his way.

No, he comes even for us whose faith is so feeble and fragile and insubstantial. So maybe today you're thinking, oh, I need to get my life in order first and then I'll come to Jesus.

Jesus says that's not the way. The gospel is not, I'll get my chaos and my disorder under control first and then I'll follow Jesus. The gospel is, go to Jesus precisely because your life is full of chaos and disorder.

[31 : 20] So don't wait any longer. If you have never committed your life to Jesus as saviour and lord before, well, go for it. Tell me, or a Christian, you know that you want to trust him for the first time today.

And if we are Christians today, well, don't get tired of Jesus. Don't ask, is anybody else there? Because anybody else will be vastly inferior.

you know, as a pastor, I have the privilege of sometimes hearing some of you tell me your problems. And to be honest, some of the problems that I hear, they are not small.

And I feel just as overwhelmed by some of it as you are. And I think, how is this going to be fixed? until I remember, my job as a pastor is not necessarily to fix everything that comes my way.

It is to point you to the anchor, the Lord Jesus Christ. And when you hold on to him, he promises you this future.

[32 : 36] Revelation 21, verse 1. God's word is not saying that there will be no beach holidays in the future.

But he says, one day, in the new creation, the sea, that is the forces of chaos and destruction, will be no more.

that's what we can look forward to. And until then, as the preacher Spurgeon wonderfully said, we can learn to kiss the waves that throw us up against the rock of ages.

Let's pray. Father, this morning we have sung that you are the king of the storm and that we can find rest in Christ alone.

So I pray that this morning many of us, all of us, not just many of us, will find rest in Christ. Whether the waters are still today or whether the winds are howling, I pray that we will all turn to you, we will all treasure you, because you are the one who commands even the wind and the water and help us to follow you all the way to the end, to the other side of the shore.

[34 : 18] We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.