

Storms, Silence and the Sovereignty of God

Imagine yourself going back in a time machine to witness this miracle in **Mark 4**:

On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." 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. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. 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?" 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. But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

Mark 4:35-41

This event takes place after a full day's teaching. Jesus, being fully human, is exhausted. He instructs the disciples to cross over to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, and proceeds to fall asleep on the boat. This body of water is around 21km long and 13km wide. It's low-lying – below sea level – and the mountains around it act like a funnel for the winds. Worse, the Sea of Galilee (a large freshwater lake, really) is not very deep – and so it is easier to very tall waves to be whipped up. Sudden and very violent storms are not uncommon.

They're caught in a massive storm ensues, and the disciples fear for lives. They wake Jesus up and accuse Him of being neglectful. Jesus gets up, says 'Peace, be still,' and at once, the storm is stilled. That's Jesus, being fully God, getting obedience from the winds and the waves that He created. The disciple's timid fear now turns into a reverent fear – "Who is this?"

This passage teaches us a fundamental truth which every person needs to know: the Sovereign Jesus Christ Himself allows storms to grow your faith in Him, and experience His power and His love. To unpack that, we'll look at three main ideas from this passage.

1. Storms are part of God's will for you

Difficulties, problems, pains, heartaches, troubles, frustrations, needs, hardships, calamities, tragedies, losses, humiliations, disappointments – these are all part of God's plan for your life.

Being in the will of God does not guarantee a trouble-free life. Prophets of ease and tranquillity tell us it will be all hunky-dory all the way to glory. But in this passage Jesus is the one who tells them to go over to the other side of the lake. This means that it was the will of God for them to be caught in the storm; the storm was in Jesus' will, and in the Father's will.

From Joseph to Christ himself, there are many biblical illustrations of storms in the lives of people who were in the will of God. **Job 5:7** notes *"but man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward,"* and Paul experiences many trials as he spreads the gospel:

For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears.

2 Corinthians 7:5

But in all things, we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love...

2 Corinthians 6:4-6

This is why you should not regard storms in your life as something unusual. As **1 Peter 4:12** puts it: *“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.”*

Don't think, 'But I became a Christian – so why isn't everything easier now?' We often conclude, 'I must have done something wrong, because there is trouble in my life.' This is what the friends of Job assumed when they essentially told him, 'You must have sinned to get into this fix.' But unless you know you have clearly disobeyed the revealed will of God, do not read providence or circumstances this way. Consider these verses:

For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake...

Philippians 1:29

...that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.

1 Thessalonians 3:3-4

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.

2 Corinthians 1:8

Sometimes the suffering will be severe – as much as you can take. This is how God grows you. Remember, the boat in our passage from Mark was full, and even the seasoned fishermen in it began to panic. Consider as an illustration how strength-training works – to build physical fitness, you need to increase stress on the muscle. God will only **stretch** your view of Him if He **stresses** your view of Him.

Comfort, ease, luxury, problem-free living do nothing to grow our faith. What stresses our view of a good God who is in control of our lives is when bad things seem to be happening, and they seem to be out of control. Such things could include crime incidents, severe work stress, fatal or crippling disease or financial crisis. As Isaac Watts put it in his hymn, *Am I a Soldier of the Cross*:

*Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?*

But God will not let it go too far. He knows what you are able to bear, and He always provides a way of escape.

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

One could say, "I don't see why there must be storms at all in my life. Why can't God teach me these things some other way?" But think about a prisoner complaining. One could always ask them two questions: where are you, and how did you get there?

Now, why would Christ have led His disciples right into a storm? Because God is always more interested in what happens **inside** you, than in what happens **around** you.

- Inside you are acts of will affect you for all eternity: issues of faith, beliefs in God and His character. These thoughts and acts will shape your destiny for trillions of years to come.
- Around you are circumstances – merely physical things which can be changed immediately. They affect only your life for the few remaining years any of us have.

In a similar way, a mother whose child begins to cough up blood will not be as concerned about the blood stains on their clothes, as she will be about what is happening inside her child. And God is not as much concerned about your finances, physical health, reputation, success, your personal security, your job situation or your human relationships as He is about your view of Him and your beliefs in Him. Because if in the middle of the storm – you are coughing up unbelief – that's what He is most concerned about.

Well, here God allows something which is going to be a cough medicine like no other! First, the crisis of the storm, and second, the fact that He Himself slept through it.

Notice carefully what this crisis brings out of the disciples – what are they coughing up? *"Master, don't you care that we are perishing?"* In a word: unbelief.

They look at Christ sleeping, and they conclude that He is neglecting them. He is selfishly taking care of Himself while they perish. Now why is that absurd? Why is it ridiculous to believe that Jesus is neglecting them in this storm? The answer is that if they perish – then He perishes. But as the lyrics to the song *Master The Tempest Is Raging* put it:

*Whether the wrath of the storm-tossed sea,
Or demons or men, or whatever it be
No waters can swallow the ship where lies
The Master of ocean, and earth, and skies*

What does unbelief say? 'God doesn't care. God is removed from me.' And I wonder if God hasn't done a similar thing in your life – a serious storm *and* His seeming silence. When God seems to be absent, when He seems to be uninvolved – what has been coming out of you?

On the other hand, when you put Jesus in the same storm, and comes out of Him? His example is one of faith for us all, because it reveals simple trust in God the Father – Jesus so at peace that He is asleep in the boat!

*Then you will walk safely in your way, and your foot will not stumble.
When you lie down, you will not be afraid; yes, you will lie down, and your sleep will be sweet.
Do not be afraid of sudden terror, nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes;
For the Lord will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught.*

Proverbs 3:23-26

Commented [AJ1]: This said: "Illus: prisoner complaining" - not sure exactly how you expanded on this. Without more context, this sounds a little out of place here - either expand so it links better to the sentences before and after, or delete.

Where is fear if your Father is in control of everything? What are the troubling uncertainties? What are the real threats or dangers? And what should eyes of faith have concluded about Jesus' silence? In fact, His silence is proof that all is well. If He is calm, then there cannot be a problem – because we know that He is loving and not neglectful of His children.

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

1 Peter 5:6-7

"The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep."

John 10:13-15

The point is this: God allows stormy situations, where He can seem afar off, to bring out what we truly believe about God. The situations that most reveal what we believe about God are the ones where we have the least control, and God seems to be the most silent. God uses it to show you what you really believe about Him, and then challenges your belief with His Word.

Don't forget, Jesus Christ has full power over every situation. On this occasion, He simply speaks to the sea and the waves, as if they are sentient beings, literally saying, 'Be silent, be muzzled.' As it were, He looks at the forces of nature and says, 'Stop it.'

God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all those around Him. O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty like You, O Lord? Your faithfulness also surrounds You. You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, You still them.

Psalms 89:7-9

Two miracles take place – the winds stop, and the waves die down immediately. And the disciples ask: 'Who is this? Who can command Creation and it obeys?' The answer: only the Creator. And if Jesus can control creation itself, what situation is out of His hands?

Is the economy?

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:19

Is crime and criminals?

*Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.
For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.
Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.
Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.*

Psalms 37:1-4

Are the actions of other people?

The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.

Proverbs 21:1

Is political instability?

Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, "Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision.

Psalms 2:1-4

Is a lack of money?

The Lord will not allow the righteous soul to famish, but He casts away the desire of the wicked.

Proverbs 10:3

Is a health situation?

*Now see that I, even I, am He, and there is no God besides Me.
I kill and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; nor is there any who can deliver from My hand.*

Deuteronomy 32:39

Is tragedy, calamity or even death?

We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

2 Corinthians 4:8-10

Is there any problem too complex, too great, too much for Him to handle?

"Ah, Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You."

Jeremiah 32:17

Jesus calmed the storm not because the disciples' lives were particularly in danger, but because their faith was in danger. By responding *"How is it that you have no faith?"* He was asking, 'How is it that you do not believe you are safe with Me?' Their faith was lacking in His **Word** – as He was the one who initiated the journey (*"Let us cross over"*) And their faith was lacking because He was **with** them, and they forgot His presence.

When we look with eyes of faith, we can say, 'With Jesus in my boat, I can smile at any storm.' He cannot forget you or neglect you because the prints on His hands always remind Him of you!

*"Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb?
Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands;
your walls are continually before Me.*

Isaiah 49:15-16

"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

John 16:33

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted

as sheep for the slaughter.” Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Romans 8:35-37

Note that the Bible does not say difficult and painful things will not happen. It says that these things cannot sever our favourable relationship with Christ.

In our key passage, the disciples’ fear of faithlessness, their timidity – was turned by Jesus into fear of faithfulness – a feeling of awe and reverence appropriate of worship. Through the experience, they came to see why Christ’s behaviour on the boat was correct and theirs wasn’t – Christ was in full control of every situation.

So what does He want from us? Trust. Trust that He is a Sovereign God – and in full control. Trust that He is a loving God – who cares for you. Let the storms draw out a view of a God in full control, and a God who loves you. That kind of rest and peace glorifies Him.

Who glorified God the Father the most on that boat? Jesus. Put Jesus in a storm – and what comes out of Him? Perfect trust in the Father – so much so that He can sleep in a violent storm. And when you have rest and peace through the storms of life – it glorifies the sovereign power and sovereign love of your Saviour.

Right you, you’re either in a storm, coming out of a storm, or about to go into one. The most important thing is not going to be your health, or your possessions, or your money or security etc. It is going to be your faith. How will you view Christ in the storm? Will you see him as neglecting you? Or will you see Him as a Sovereign God who controls what happens in your life, and as a Loving God who cares what happens to your eternal soul?