

Faith Over Fear
Luke 8:22-25

Well, this morning, though many things are different for us, one thing is not, we are continuing in our sermon series through Luke's Gospel, and in the providence of God our next passage is especially applicable for us today.

This is probably a much more familiar passage for most than our passage last week. Luke 8:22-25...

Luke 8:22-25

22 One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they set out, **23** and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. **24** And they went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. **25** He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?"

ILLUSTRATION - *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee* (Rembrandt, 1633)

Now, I would not consider myself a great appreciator of fine art, however there is one piece of art in particular that I have grown to really appreciate since having seen it. It is a painting depicting the very scene we just read about in our passage, titled "The Storm on the Sea of Galilee." It was painted in 1633 by the renowned Dutch artist, Rembrandt.

I have grown to really enjoy this piece of art for a few reasons. First, it has a unique history. For some time this painting hung in an art gallery in Boston, until one day in 1990 it, along with a number of other pieces of art, was stolen in what would become the largest art heist in US history. In fact, this painting is still missing today. The authorities have no idea where it is. So, there is a unique history to it.

But, I've also grown to appreciate it because of a certain detail that Rembrandt included in it. If you look at the people in the boat, you will see Jesus and the disciples.

Some are manning the sails, some are crowded around Jesus pleading with him, one is bent over the side presumably getting sick, but if you count the people in the boat, you will see Jesus and 13 other men. That's interesting because we know that Jesus traveled with 12 men, his 12 disciples. But as you look at the different men in the boat there is one in a blue, kind of teal, shirt staring directly at the viewer. It turns out this disciple number 13 is none other than Rembrandt. He painted a self-portrait in the boat with the disciples.

We can all identify with Rembrandt here, I think. Though none of us were in the boat with the disciples and Jesus that stormy day in Galilee, nonetheless many of us feel like we are enduring storms throughout lives.

The Bible often describes trials and difficulties with storm-like language...

Ps. 57:1

Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.

Ps. 69:1-2, 14-15

1 Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. **2** I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me...**14** Deliver me from sinking in the mire; let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep waters. **15** Let not the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up, or the pit close its mouth over me.

Again, we can identify with these sentiments about the trials of life. It seems we face an innumerable amount of potential storms in life that have the power to cause us to well up with fear. Fear of natural disasters, fear of financial collapse, fear of failure, fear of being alone, fear of disapproval and rejection, and certainly, to state the obvious this morning, the fear of disease and death! The nature of our fallen world is that we continually feel like we are enduring a storm **and** if/when the storm passes, the next storm is always lurking nearby.

So this morning, not just in light of our current circumstances but also because of our passage this morning, we need to ask how can we walk by faith and not fear? How can we have hearts submitted to the sovereignty of God? And how can our hearts find comfort in the gospel while we endure trials in this life? We can be reminded of some important truths from our passage this week to help us grow in our faith in the midst of storms we face.

REVIEW STORY

Again, in the story we see Jesus take his disciples onto a boat telling them to sail to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. As they are sailing Jesus falls asleep. Jesus has worked hard, had some long days of ministry and is just tired. We see a great picture of his humanity here.

As he is sleeping a windstorm, or a squall, comes onto the lake and puts the boat in serious danger. The Sea of Galilee is about 700 feet below sea level, surrounded by mountains so it is not uncommon for windstorms to blow there causing storms like this one. And again, this is a serious storm. Remember that some of the guys on that boat were fishermen by trade. They have spent a lot of time on the water and yet they are scared for their lives. This must have been serious for them to panic like this.

Terrified of what was seemingly going to be their last few moments alive, they awake Jesus in a panic, Jesus gets up and with his authoritative word, an authority we've seen him exercise multiple times so far in Luke's gospel, he speaks and the winds and waves calm. And I know that it is tempting to rush to making some kind of application when we walk through this passage, which we will do, but I don't want us to rush past this moment. Jesus, the One who has all authority of heaven and earth, the One who sustains all things by the Word of his power, the One who commands all of creation, calms the storm with a simple utterance of rebuke.

From there in the passage we see 2 questions asked. One by Jesus to his disciples and one by the disciples to one another about Jesus. Jesus asks them, "Where is your faith?" Note, he doesn't have to ask "Where is your fear?" That was obvious. The fear of the disciples were driving their actions. The question was, "Where is your faith?"

We are going to make a few observations from this passage this morning, and the first I want to note is:

1. Fear is not a Christian response to storms.

Again Jesus rebukes the disciples, "Where is your faith?" Almost saying, guys your response should have been very different than what I just saw. And it is obvious that you were driven by fear and not by faith. One commentator wrote, "The boat was not the only thing swamped that day; the fear of the disciples overwhelmed their faith."¹

Reluctantly most of us can identify with the disciples here. For most of us when we get bad news or we begin to think about a developing situation in our own lives or on a larger scale, our imaginations often run to worst case scenarios. And fear grows in our hearts, sometimes slowly, sometimes immediately, until the faith we say we have seems lost. Jesus could say just as easily to us, "Where is your faith? I don't see it."

Jesus asks that of us because, again, fear is not a Christian response to storms.

Many, many times in Scripture we are told to not be afraid, to not worry, to not be anxious. And when we read those verses it might be easy to think that the biblical writers, or Jesus even, are being really naive. Don't they know the trouble that we face? Because if they did, then they wouldn't say to not be afraid. Telling someone to not be afraid is a lot like telling someone to calm down. It's not all that helpful.

¹ Ryken *Luke*, vol. 1, 384.

“Fear not” is never the call to naively think that there aren’t alarming things in life, on the contrary, “fear not” is a command to rest our hearts and minds on biblical truths in spite of those alarming and scary things.

Paul Tripp wrote, “Biblical faith looks reality in the face and does not flinch.”²

So how do we do that? How do we gain that kind of faith?

2. Ultimately, faith in the midst of fearful circumstances is obtained by being captivated by a greater fear. (v. 25)

Did you catch how Luke includes that though the sea was calm the disciples were afraid, not afraid of the storm but afraid of Jesus. They were led to a greater fear.

This “fear” that they experienced wasn’t a sense of terror, where now they feared their demise would now come at the hands of Jesus rather than the storm, it was a fear that was characterized by awe, by respect, by wonder.

And this is important for us to learn as we endure storms. We can find relief for anxiety and fear by letting our fears of the storms become overwhelmed by a right and healthy fear of our Almighty Lord.

For the disciples, all of a sudden, they are no longer concerned about the wind and waves. They are now fixed on the One who controls the winds and the waves. They are in awe.

It’s far too easy to let our circumstances loom large while forgetting that our God looms much larger. In these moments we need to have our hearts and minds refocused. We need to have our fears prioritized. The Lord God Almighty, the One who created the heavens and the earth, is present and active in your life. If God is for us, who can be against us?

This story reminds us of some very important truths about God and his work for us that can help build an unshakeable faith and the next observation in our passage is...

3. God is never asleep but is always in control.

Jesus is literally sleeping in the boat and I’m sure it confused the disciples. How could he be sleeping at a time like this? And it is very easy for us as we go through difficult circumstances to feel as if God does not care, particularly if we’ve been praying and the situation doesn’t seem to get any better. We might ask, God are you asleep?

Ps. 44:23-26

² Paul David Tripp, *New Morning Mercies*

23 Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever!
24 Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? **25** For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our belly clings to the ground. **26** Rise up; come to our help! Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love!

When it seems like God is asleep it will feel as if he doesn't care. In fact, in one of the parallel passages of this story (Mark 4) we see this. Mark writes for us that not only were the disciples waking Jesus screaming, "we are perishing," they even asked Jesus in that moment, "do you even care that we are perishing?"

It might have seemed like Jesus was apathetic and was completely out of control of the situation, but we need to remember that it was Jesus' idea for them to go out on the sea! There was no cause for concern on Jesus' part. Why would the one who created all things be fearful of his creation? He was sovereign over it all, demonstrated in his rebuking the winds and waves.

While the disciples thought Jesus was indifferent, Jesus was in control. He was sovereign over the situation. The term "sovereign" speaks of God's supreme reign, that he alone is in control and not only *can* do whatever he pleases, he *will* do whatever he pleases. There is no one and nothing to thwart his plans and purposes.

Jesus was sovereign that day in Galilee over their circumstance and to this day he remains sovereign over your life and my life.

Now, to believe that God is sovereign, in and of himself, is not enough to quell all of our fears, worries, and anxiety. It is not enough to know that God will do whatever he pleases, that he can and will exercise his complete control. Because we might ask then and even wonder to ourselves, *how* will he exercise that control? We need to remind ourselves of some truths that extend beyond the reality that God is sovereign. We need to know something of his character.

Jerry Bridges wrote a short book called *Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts*, and in it he argues that there are three vital truths for a Christian to remember in the midst of suffering. One of those is that God is completely sovereign, as we've said, he's in control. But beyond that we must remember that he is also perfect in love and infinite in wisdom.

In other words, God sovereignly works in our lives, because he can. But because he is perfect in love he does so in a way to bring about our good and because he is infinitely wise he knows *how* to bring about good. God's sovereignty, God's goodness, and God's wisdom are the three legs of a stool we can sit upon and find some rest.

We can truly believe what Paul writes in Romans 8...

Romans 8:28

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

We can believe the next observation of our passage...

4. The sovereignty of God means he can and will use storms to produce good in us.

We see this with the disciples question to one another concerning Jesus, “Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?”

This is a significant moment in the lives of the disciples as they follow Jesus, because in the midst of the storm they were being treated to an upfront seat to the work of God which would ultimately lead to a greater faith.

In our next chapter, Luke 9, we will see what is a milestone moment in this gospel, when the disciples, voiced by Peter, make the confession that Jesus is more than just a rabbi, more than just a teacher, more than just a prophet, but that he is the Son of God. And this realization is built upon that day at sea. They had seen him do some amazing miracles, but nothing like that. It produced a new faith in them that they didn't have before.

And watching God work in our storms does the same thing for us. This is what James means when he writes in James 1...

James 1:2-4

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, **3** for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. **4** And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

We are going to meet “trials of various kinds,” health, financial, relational trials. And yet James reminds us to count it joy because though it is painful in the moment, it is producing good in us.

“I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages.” -Spurgeon

A final observation in our passage this morning is that...

5. Because of the gospel, Jesus has already calmed the most dangerous and pressing storm any of us could face.

There is actually an incredible gospel connection with this story and another well-known story of the Old Testament, the story of Jonah.

If you remember the story of Jonah, Jonah is called to go to Nineveh and call the Ninevites to repent or else God was going to bring judgment. Jonah however didn't

want to do that so he gets on a boat and sails the opposite way of Nineveh. And here we see some parallels between Jonah and Jesus:

- Both Jesus and Jonah were on boats, both were threatened by a storm.
- Both Jesus and Jonah are sleeping on the boat.
- Both Jesus and Jonah are woken by the others on the ship being told that they were going to die.
- Both storms were miraculously calmed.
- And in both stories the other passengers of the ship become more afraid after the storm than during it.

But there is a beautiful gospel picture here. In the story of Jonah, Jonah tells the sailors...

Jonah 1:12

Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.”

In effect, he tells them, there is only one way to calm this storm, I must be thrown into it. I must die, so you can live.

We will see later in Luke Jesus then say the incredible words, “behold, something greater than Jonah is here.”

Part of what he means is that he, willingly, would be thrown into the sea to save his people. Consumed by the waves of sin and death Jesus would give his life that we might live. He was willing to endure the storm that we might arrive to the other side unharmed.

The apostle John records for us what he was shown in the book of Revelation regarding the new heavens and the new earth and in chapter 21 he writes...

Revelation 21:1

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

The picture here of a vanished sea simply means that what the seas symbolized would be no more. In Scripture they are the picture of chaos, uncertainty, fears, and even the evil forces at work against God and his people.

The storms you and I face today will one day be no more because of the work of Jesus. He plunged himself into the waves and, because of that work, for us one day those waves will cease.

And the writer of Hebrews says that this work, the gospel, can be for us an “anchor of the soul” (Heb. 6:19). We can remain steadfast in the midst of uncertainty and chaos in

our lives. **If Jesus would endure the storm of death *for* you, Jesus will endure the storms of life *with* you.**

You can walk in faith rather than fear today.

CONCLUSION

Are you gripped by fear this morning? Do you feel like you are enduring a storm? What truths do you need to cling to today so that your restless heart and mind can be calmed like the sea of Galilee?

What truths do you need to share with someone else, maybe a neighbor or family member, to be a help in this difficult time?

Don't fear. Walk in Faith. Trust your sovereign, wise, and good Lord.

VERSES

Colossians 2:5

Luke 8:22-25

[PICTURE OF PAINTING]

Psalms 57:1

Psalms 69:1-2

Psalms 69:14-15

Psalms 44:23-26

Romans 8:28

James 1:2-4

Jonah 1:12

Revelation 21:1

Philippians 4:6-7

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What storm(s) are you facing right now?
2. What would it look like to be overcome by a greater fear of God than the fears of our storms?
3. How does God's sovereignty, wisdom, and goodness encourage you in the midst of trials?
4. Looking back on previous trials in your life, can you now identify any ways that God used them for your good and his glory?
5. How can the gospel, with its future promises, calm our hearts in the midst of our current storms?
6. Spend time praying for one another, our church, our city, our nation, and our world.