

“One Dark & Stormy Night”

We just finished celebrating Jesus Christ’s entrance into humanity on one dark and starry night, and that’s where it all began, but I want to encourage you today that He moved in power on one dark and STORMY night and He promises to continue to move in the dark and stormy nights of your life again, and again, and again.

Mark 4:35-41 (NIV)

Jesus Calms the STORM

³⁵ That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” ³⁶ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. ³⁷ A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. ³⁸ Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”

³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

⁴⁰ He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

1. What Storms Are You Going Through?

Storms Happen.

The world states this in another way but I’ll keep it PG rated today. Isn’t it true though? Storms Happen. Are you taking the time to identify this reality or are you just trying to rush through life, hoping the storm(s) go away and all the pieces will just fall into place? The first thing we must do is come to grips with the reality that bad things happen to good people, even people who love and follow Jesus Christ. No matter how much pain you are

experiencing in the middle of your storm, it's like a wound on our bodies that we must treat and not just ignore.

I think of my kids and when they fall and scrape themselves, so much so that some skin comes off their body. We've all been there. After the initial shock of what sounds like another life-or-death injury begins to wear off, the screaming only heightens as they see dad or mom bust out the much hated and feared bottle of HYDROGEN PEROXIDE!!! "No, not that... anything but that," is the reaction we always seem to get without fail from any of our young children when we attempt to treat one of their "owwies." And you know how the story goes, after a valiant attempt, mom and dad always win and the solution finally reaches the affected area, we some bubbling, followed by a few more screams of horror, and then eventually, the wound is clean and we are ready to finish cleaning it and ultimately finish the job with all that they wanted in the first place, a BAND-AID. Isn't it ridiculous that the band aid gets all the credit when the job is done?! It's not mom or dad, oh no, it's the band aid. "Dad, if you would've just put the darn band aid on it to begin with, NONE of this would've happened," seems to be the nonverbal communication I am met with time and time again. *While writing this message, I just decided I'm going to invent a band aid that has hydrogen peroxide laced inside the bandage! ☺

And so here we are, in the middle of our storm, in the middle of our pain and God wants us to stop and take a moment to reflect on our lives and ask Him, and ask ourselves, what are the storms in my life that are desiring to bring me under? Church, don't fall into the trap that the enemy lays for us of using "busyness" to glaze over our troubles. Don't allow your schedule or your to-do list or any deadlines to take priority over identifying the storms in your life so that you can hand them over to Jesus to treat and care for like only He can. And don't allow people, that seem like they never have any storms in their lives, make you feel like you are somehow less than or even outside of God's family because you are going through one. Live your life as in imperfect person desiring change, rather than a perfect person desiring acclaim.

2. What's Your Focus On?

The Point Is NOT The Storm. The Point Is JESUS!

It's so easy for me, when I'm experiencing a storm, to take my eyes off Christ and put them on my problems. It's too easy. I don't know if you can relate to that but it happens too much. There's chaos with the kids: I need to be in control. The finances just aren't adding up: time to pick a fight with my wife. Something unexpected happens that absolutely rocks me to the core: "God, are you really there, or at best, why me?" It's way too easy for us to put our focus on the problems around us that we often miss Jesus in the middle of them.

I wonder what was going through the disciples' minds as they were in the middle of this squall that had come up. "Does he not see what we're going through?" "This seems like the wrong time to be sleeping Jesus." "I need to get me one of those cushions!" Regardless, it seems like they were frustrated and afraid, at the very least. Jesus sees the fear in their eyes and asks them "why are you so afraid?" in verse 40 and you can just read the frustration earlier when they wake Jesus up and say to Him, "don't you care if we drown?" Wow. When you really stop and consider how whichever of the disciples asked him that question... I mean, this is the God of the universe, and He's certainly proven Himself to the disciples time and time again. The audacity and even disrespect of this disciple to be so presumptuous toward Jesus... it floors me that Jesus doesn't at least rebuke him along with the wind and the waves, if not toss him overboard! But, before we jump to judgment, I can understand where this disciple is coming from, if I'm honest with myself, because I've been there too.

It seems like Jesus' buddies were wanting Him to freak out along with them. Like they were wanting Him to wake up and frantically start rowing for shore, like His very life depended on it! A question I have for each of us today: is that how we treat Jesus when the storms of life hit us? Do we expect the God of the universe to be calm, cool and collected, understanding that He's faced a few things bigger than our current problem, or do we expect Him to respond just as panicked, anxious and afraid as us? When our focus is on the problem and our eyes are on the storm, it's easy for us to act just like the disciples did and in turn for us to treat Jesus with that same sense of presumption and even disrespect. But I want to encourage you today

church, when we remember that the point of the storm is to keep our eyes on Jesus, to continue trusting in His faithfulness and to really believe that He has the best in mind for each of us...everything changes. The storm dissipates. The troublesome times become less troublesome. Where there was once chaos, there is now calm. But hear me out, we might still have to paddle to the other side of the lake...we'll probably still need to do the work to get to the other side of the problem, but we've heard Jesus, we've seen God in the middle of the storm and He has carried us through it.

3. Where Will You Go From Here?

Our Job: To Be In Awe of Jesus.

Judah Smith, well known author and pastor, says in his book, "LIFE IS ___," a book I received much inspiration from for this message and one I would encourage each of you to go out and pick up, Judah writes, "It's easy to be in awe of Jesus AFTER the storm. But the point of this passage is that we should be in awe of Jesus DURING the storm." After vs. During. Hmm...causes quite a stir in my and a prodding to consider just how different my life would be today had I lived it with more of a "during mentality" instead of the all too familiar and popular "after mentality." You know people like that, certainly not yourself, but other people...that say "Oh I'll deal with that issue in my marriage later" or "yeah, I know God is with me BUT..." and then they begin to list off excuses why they can't seem to trust Him completely. Can I submit something to you today, that the more often we are just in AWE of God, good times AND bad, the more spiritual growth we will experience in this life. In fact, I think I'm convinced that we WON'T grow and are in essence DONE GROWING if we are not willing to trust God and just stand in awe of him in the bad times, just as we do in the good. We'll never go further in the process of sanctification, become holy as Jesus Christ is holy, if we're not committed to trusting God in the middle of the storm. Aren't storms even, dare I say, necessary, for us to grow? Trees are CUT (pain) so that they might bear more fruit. I remember waking up in the middle of the night and crying out in extreme pain because I had these horrible cramps in my legs...GROWING PAINS. And we're all aware of the process it takes to bring a child into this world...the miracle of life, but not without the EXTREME pains of not only birth, but also the 9 months of childbearing leading up to that. I'm giving you first place here mom's. ☺ We

simply will not grow without pain. But it's a lot harder to remember that when it comes to our spiritual walk isn't it?

As we come to a close I'll be honest with you today, it was, and still is to some degree, very difficult to be in awe of God in the middle of the biggest storm of my life. My parents' marriage of almost thirty years coming to an end. I'd love to be able to share with you that I met that storm head on, me and Jesus, and boy we just sailed through it like it was nothing. But that's not true. That storm rocked me and my siblings, my wife...to our very core. We still deal with the storm of divorce to this day, and it's fresh on my mind now as we find ourselves in the middle of another holiday season where we all seek to prioritize family. My purpose in bringing this up however, is not for us to focus on the problem or, the storm. That's exactly what my problem had been all along. During those days, months and years, divorce wanted my awe. Divorce wanted the headlines, the attention, the focus. That's what the enemy of our lives, the devil, is all about: taking our focus off of Christ and putting it onto earthly things. And to some degree, I let that happen. I can see that now. And it hurts to swallow that pill. But, I will not wallow in self-pity; I will not bow to any man-made doctrine; and I certainly will not stand in awe of anyone or anything but Jesus Christ, and Christ alone!

Why does he want our awe and wonder and reverence? Because that's what we were created for: to worship God with everything and in everything and so, doing that very thing sets on fire with passion and builds within us confidence to live out His purposes here and now, in this life that He's so graciously given us to live as a gift. And after all, doesn't he deserve it? You bet! He deserves all of that and so much more because of Him choosing to NOT give us what we deserve!

When we face our next "Dark & Stormy Night" and find that we are smack dab in the middle of another storm, because we will be, let's all do our best to remember that God is with us. Whether it be financial hardship, broken relationship, marital strife, depression, sickness, death, divorce...and the list goes on, let's remember that Jesus is bigger than any storm we face. Let's remember that it's ok if we get a little wet or even soaked while our boat is rocking back and forth, but one thing he promises us: that He will never let us drown as we keep our eyes on Him.

Let's Pray