

John 6:14-21
"Sent Into The Storm"

Why is it that we think Jesus should take away all our troubles? As if life in Christ should always/only be about creature comforts. We forget that God's chief objective in our lives *isn't happiness*; it's *holiness*. Jesus didn't come to take away our *struggles*; He came to take away our *sin*. In fact, He'll often use our struggles to *strengthen* our faith, to remind us who we're not so that we learn to walk in humility, to disillusion us concerning the things of this world and set our longing more deeply upon Him and the desire to be with Him.

It flies in the face of the theology of some, yet today's text teaches us that there are times when Jesus will even *send us* into the storm. Tough times in your life aren't a categorical indicator that you're out of God's will. In fact, they may be the sign that you're right where you need to be!

Are there times when wrong decisions, sin, and stubbornness reap hard-to-handle ramifications? Absolutely, yes! But typically, those things are pretty easy to place your finger on. Let's be honest. You generally know if you've sinned or stepped out of line with Scripture. — But maybe you don't, perhaps you're engaging in some sin of ignorance. You didn't recognize or realize that you stepped out of line. It's why I like to keep the 23rd and 24th verses of Psalm 139 close to the vest and offer them occasionally as a prayer. **"Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting."**¹ "Lord, if there's sin in my life, if I've sown to the wind and I'm reaping the whirlwind, reveal it to me that I might repent. Lead me in the way everlasting. I want to walk in righteousness, in obedience to Your Word."

But if the Lord doesn't reveal anything to you, you may simply (albeit maybe with great difficulty) be in the refiner's fire. God is *refining* you, breaking you down and removing *impurity* from you, making you more like Jesus... Sometimes (like the disciples in today's text), we're sent into the storm.

We enter Jn Ch 6, directly on the heels of the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus received a little boy's offering, blessed it, broke it, and through it impacted thousands of lives. In the boy's hands, it didn't amount to much; in the hands of Jesus, it was more than enough. Remember, it's not about what you bring to the table, it's about whose table you bring it to! Jesus supplies the sustenance; His disciples distribute it to hungry souls.

¹ *The New King James Version* (Ps 139:23-24). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

Don't miss the point in place. You cannot give what you have not received. If you're not receiving from the Lord, you have nothing to offer a hungry soul. We give to others what we've first received from Him. The disciples would give what they received, return to Jesus, He would resupply them, and they would continue to minister to others.

This is how ministry is maintained. We go to Jesus, He pours *into* us that He might give to others *through* us. Once we've given what we've received, we return to Him to be "resupplied". It keeps us in communication *with* Him, near *to* Him, and dependent *upon* Him...

Vs 14

What was it about this sign that caused them to connect the dots to Deuteronomy 18? It's there that Moses says, "*The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear,*"² So they're doing the math.

"Moses was in the desert. We're in a deserted place. Moses provided bread from heaven for the people. Jesus just provided bread for all of us... Moses gave the people God's Word; Jesus has been teaching God's Word all day. He has the overtones of a Prophet like Moses. He must be the Guy!"

And they were right! Don't miss this, their *reasoning* was right! Their *reaction* — their *response* — was wrong. Their interest in Jesus revolved *around* and was limited to what He could *give* them, how He could *benefit* them.

They were ready to enthrone Jesus (by force), *not* because He is holy, *not* because He alone is worthy of all honor and power and praise. — But because He was a free meal ticket and could make their lives a whole lot easier. And lest you think I'm reading something into the text that isn't there, Jesus will tell them plainly this very thing in Vs 26. — This is what I was speaking to in our introduction. We're not so different today. For many, it's not about who Jesus is, it's about what Jesus can give! "Jesus can take away my problems, provide creature comforts, and make my life easier. Of course I want this Guy over me!"

And what happens is that we (essentially) become mercenaries. We're not loyal to a *Person* or a *principle* but to whatever provides *profit*. Our *service* becomes *self-serving*. If we're not careful, we can slip into that kind of mindset. You may recall, Satan accused Job of this very thing.

² *The New King James Version* (Dt 18:15) (1982). Thomas Nelson.

Satan presented himself before God & God was like, “You’ve been considering My servant Job, haven’t you? There’s no one like him on the face of the entire earth, blameless, upright, fears God and shuns evil.” Satan said, *“Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!”*³ Translation? *Of course* Job serves You; You’ve made him rich beyond his wildest dreams! Who wouldn’t serve You under those terms! Let me get *my* hands on him and by the time I’m finished with him, he’ll curse You to Your face...”

Question: What if God allowed all that you have to be systematically, beyond anything you could imagine, painfully stripped away? Would you default to the quick, yet not so thought-through position, “How could a God of love—” fill in the blank. Or would you be able to say, *“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked shall I return there.”* (I came here with nothing, I’ll leave with nothing) *The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord.”*⁴ Or as we read in Job 13, *“Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.”*⁵

The question is, “Who’s truly the Lord?” If I’ll serve Jesus so long as He serves *me*, then who’s truly the Lord? This is where the idea of submission comes in, yes? We’re willing to get on board with Jesus so long as He serves us, or “leads us” in the way we think He should. Who then is the Lord? Listen, He’s not getting on board with *our* plan; we’re to get on board with *His*. But here’s the thing, *His* way isn’t going to look like our way. The people had a plan, but He’s not on board... Notice.

Vs 15

They were prepared to put Him in a position of political power because they wanted someone who would deliver them from the oppression of *Rome* (oppression from *sin* wasn’t even on their radar). But Jesus wasn’t interested *in* nor seduced *by* a crowd that wanted to make Him king. He’d already *faced* this temptation once. *The devil had taken Him up on a Mt and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. He offered to give them all to Jesus if He’d just fall down and worship him... He offered Him the crown apart from the cross. But Jesus didn’t come to serve Himself; He came to save us. To take the crown apart from the cross would be to leave us lost...*

³ *The New King James Version* (Job 1:9-11). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version* (Job 1:21). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version* (Job 13:15). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

A temptation He'd already decisively rejected. He didn't just come to get the field (Matt 13:44), but to gain the treasure that was hidden *in* it. Jesus redeemed the whole world because He wanted the treasure (you and me) that was in it.

Vs 16-17

One detail that John leaves out, but that we discover in Matthew and Mark, is that Jesus *made* His disciples depart from that scene. The reason they went down to the Sea, got into the boat, and crossed to the other side is that Jesus told them to. We're not sure if perhaps they were beginning to get infected by the prospect of Jesus being made king, so He sent them away before they fell prey to the temptation, or what. But He told them to get in the boat and go to the other side while He dismissed the crowd.

Another detail we pick up in Matt and Mark is that after Jesus sent the multitude away, He went up on that Mt (that large hillside) to pray. Not only would He spend time seeking the Father's heart *personally*, but He would intercede for His disciples, knowing they were being stretched *spiritually*.

The picture is one of Jesus up on the top of the hill, looking down at His disciples shoving off at night. As far as they can tell, He's not with them ("Jesus had not come to them"), but the truth is, He never took His eye off them.

Let's recall from last week that Passover was near. That means there was a full moon out. It wasn't a *rainstorm* that was upon them; it was a *windstorm*. Squalls *still* take place on the Sea of Galilee today. It's 600' below sea level. Wind comes whipping over the hillside down onto the Sea, stirs it up, you're in a wooden rowboat; it's treacherous. But Mark tells us that Jesus *saw them* straining at rowing, for the wind was against them. He *sent them* into this storm. He *knew* it was coming.

But (listen), He wanted to reveal Himself to them in a deeper way. He *knew* they were headed for a storm, a season of struggle; they would be strained and stretched, but His eye was *on* them, and He was praying *for* them. How many of you realize you don't experience the deep things of God without going through deep things? There are certain sides of Jesus we just can't see, certain revelations we just can't receive until we're in the thick of it...

Last week, we drew attention to how the Lord was *moving*. Here we see that a storm was *brewing*. So often it's this way: the Lord is moving, but on the heels of that, a storm is brewing. (I etched in the margin of my Bible beside this section, "Tough times in the will of God.") The disciples weren't out of God's will; they were obeying Jesus' direct orders!

God's will... will not exempt you from tough times! *Sometimes...* it invites them. The disciples are about to learn that whether they can see Jesus, or sense Jesus (or not), He is always with them— and faithful to them.

Vs 18

Again, I remind you that they were in this position at the behest of Jesus. My point being that following the command of Christ does not guarantee the wind at your back or smooth sailing ahead! And sometimes it can be tough for us to reconcile the “why” behind the rough waters we’ve been sent into. It goes back to letting the Lord be the Lord. His ways aren’t my ways, His thoughts aren’t my thoughts. He has information and understanding at His disposal that I don’t have. I’m so often thinking temporally, He’s thinking eternally. I’m thinking comfort, He’s thinking consecration. I’m thinking happiness, He’s thinking holiness. I’m focused on how it feels. He’s focused on increasing my faith...

Perhaps you remember the scene in your mind’s eye. There he was, J.B., in prison. He sends to Jesus, “Are you the One we’re waiting for or should we look for another?” This whole time John has been preaching Jesus as the coming One, the Lamb of God, the Lord, the Son of God! He’s the One who came to set the captives free! But now John is in prison. It doesn’t make sense; he can’t figure it out. How could this be? — Jesus turns to John’s messengers and says, *“Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended (made to stumble) because of Me.”*⁶ “It’s not always going to add up, John. It’s not always going to make sense to you. It’s not always going to be smooth sailing. But blessed is the one who doesn’t get tripped up, who doesn’t fall over the fact that things aren’t as they thought they *would* be or *should* be with Me as their Lord.

Vs 19

Ya think! This is one of those great understatements of the Bible! ☺ Matthew tells us they thought they were seeing a ghost! And we get it! You don’t expect to see a man walking on stormy waters around 4 in the morning! But this gives us an indication of how bad the storm was. Because we learn that they took off after the sun went down (it was already dark).

⁶ *The New King James Version* (Mt 11:4–6). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

Matthew tells us that Jesus came to them in the 4th watch of the night (between 3-6:00 am) and that they were out in the middle of the lake. (Remember, at its widest point it's around 8 miles), They've been pumping the oars for around 8 hours, and they've only made it 3-4 miles. They probably didn't cross in the center of the Sea, but max they're between ½ and 2/3 of the way across.

I'll guarantee you at this point, they're more frustrated than afraid (regarding the weather), they're exhausted, they're straining, they're stressed, sleep-deprived— you get the picture. They're in the *will* of the Lord, they're being *watched* by the Lord, but they're struggling... I'm not sure how many of you ever take time to train or go to the gym, but we all understand the principle that strength (physically) is increased through resistance. The more resistance, the greater the difficulty, the stronger you get.

The same principle holds true *spiritually*. The Lord never said that He would be your bridge over troubled waters. He said, "*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior;*"⁷ We forget, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego went *into* the fire in the will of God. Daniel went *into* the lion's den, in the will of God. — **Read Hebrews 11.** Some accomplished great things, others suffered in tremendous ways... in the will of God. Jesus suffered immeasurably... in the will of God. Write it down, read it later 1 Pet 4:19. God's will is not a primrose, problem-free pathway of comfort, exempt from suffering.

But Jesus always has His eye on you, He will always be faithful to you, and He will always make His presence known to you that He might see you through at just the right time. — I'm so glad that Jesus works the night shift ☺. But we need to learn to recognize Him, don't we? It's relatively easy to recognize the Lord when it's smooth sailing, isn't it? But during turbulent times — dark, desperate times —when we're struggling, stressing, and being stretched, it can be tough.

Jesus was drawing near to the boat, but rather than being comforted by His presence, they were freaking out because they had yet to recognize Him, to realize it was Him.

Vs 20

⁷ The New King James Version (Is 43:2-3), (1982). Thomas Nelson.

Matthew tells us that it was at this point that Peter called to the Lord and said, “Lord, if it’s You, command me to come to You on the water.” And Jesus encouraged him to step out. He took a few steps, got his eyes off Jesus, and began to sink (which is a life lesson in itself). But to his credit, Peter was willing to take a step of faith, that’s more than we can say for any of the rest of them.

Vs 21

It’s interesting to realize that even in rough waters, Jesus wouldn’t “come aboard” until He was willingly received. He didn’t say, “Move over, fellas, I’m hopping in!” He was willing to walk on by if they wouldn’t receive Him.

Listen, you can choose to say, “Nice to see You, Lord, but I think I’m gonna go ahead and bring this thing to shore myself,” or, like the disciples, you and I can willingly and wisely receive Him into our boat. Notice: once Jesus got in (Matthew tells us the wind ceased), they were instantly, immediately (raptured laterally, it would seem) to their destination.

[Close] And we learn (again) from Matthew, *“Then those who were in the boat came and worshipped Him, saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God.’”*⁸ I want you to see something here, and then we’re done. **Nowhere in the gospels do we read that they (as a group) had worshipped the Lord before. Not when He healed the sick, raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead, not having heard Him teach/preach or witnessed Him miraculously feed 5,000 men. ~ But when He rescued *them*, they worshipped Him.** It’s been said, “When you recognize God as the Creator, you will admire Him. When you discover His strength, you will rely on Him. But when He saves *you*, then you worship Him.” Max Lucado

Prayer Points:

God, we thank You for the comfort and encouragement of Your Word. Thank You that You are with us in times of trouble, help us to realize that, to recognize that. Strengthen our faith, purify our hearts...

If you know what it is to go through the storm, but don’t know what it to be saved, the Lord is waiting on you to receive Him, even today. He won’t board where He’s not welcome. But He’ll bring you safe into the harbor if you invite Him in. He’s shed His blood for the forgiveness of your sin, believe on Him and be saved.

⁸ *The New King James Version* (Mt 14:33) (1982). Thomas Nelson.