

IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

Mk. 4: 34 ... and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples. 35 And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side. 36 And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships. 37 And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. 38 And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? 39 And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. 40 And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? 41 And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

As you know, I have been preparing for going to Nigeria tomorrow. I *think* ☺ I have everything in order ... and I think I'm as prepared as I can be. But I wonder if sometimes we can be in so much of a hurry we make preparations without making them with God. ... What I mean is this ... Within these next twelve days, along with my two colleagues, I'll be altogether attending about four dozen meetings ... and speaking at about twenty or more of them. An easy way to deal with such a workload is to pick through and choose old sermons you are confident with, and preach them! Make the whole experience as hassle-free and as handy as you can. ...

Sometimes I think we're very prone to make the Christian life as hassle-free and as handy as we possibly can. We 'cut corners', 'scrimping and scraping' when it comes to the Lord's work. Sometimes we're prepared to offer the Lord the least we think we can get away with ... and then we wonder why our faith won't stand up to the rigours life forces upon us. ... It is all-too common that we want God to do our bidding, while not accepting we should be doing His.

Do you remember the children's chorus? ... "With Christ in the vessel we can smile at the storm, smile at the storm ... as we go sailing home". ... The older we've become though, experience has tempered our thinking to suggest to us it's not always as easy as that. We no longer look at life through 'rose-tinted glasses'. We know that problems and disappointments 'lurk around the corner', and many of the difficulties can indeed 'take the wind out of our sails'. ... Let's consider very simply, but very practically, this account of the disciples in the boat with the Lord Jesus, as the storm swept across the Sea of Galilee.

Storms, of course, on the Sea of Galilee were a common feature. It was nothing surprising for the wind to gather suddenly and sweep the calm waters into mighty waves. It was a phenomenon you could do nothing about, - you had to accept it ... it's just the way it was!

Earlier that same day there was a great multitude gathered round the Lord Jesus as He spoke on the shores of the Sea (4:1). This was during His opening year of ministry, - His ‘year of popularity’. He was ‘the talk’ of the countryside. Everyone wanted to meet Him, to listen to Him, to watch what He would do, to be healed and to be freed from their life of bondage.

He wasn’t always easy to understand though. There were times when He spoke in parables that were shrouded in mystery ... and the ‘ordinary’ people sometimes weren’t able to grasp what He was teaching. Nevertheless, His disciples were privileged to understand most of what He was saying, and Mark describes it very simply and beautifully when he records, *v.33 And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. 34 But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.* The word ‘expounded’ is a Greek word ἐπιλύω, made up from two separate words; it means, “to loose what has previously been fastened or entangled”. In other words, the Lord Jesus was making known to His disciples the deep truths of Heaven. ... What great times those were!

Later on in that same day, as evening was approaching, *v.35 he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side.* No problem, it was a regular enough journey. Nothing was thought of it. But, Jesus knew what was about to happen. *You cannot take God unawares*, - that is the God we worship and trust! In the psalm of Moses (Ps. 77), as the people remembered the nation passing through the Red Sea, they confidently sang, *v.14 Thou art the God that doest wonders ... 17 The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound ... 18 The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook. 19 Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters.* Jesus knew exactly what would transpire on the Sea of Galilee ... *and He was prepared for it!*

As they set sail on this familiar journey, they talked among themselves and shared in each other’s company. It had been a long and busy day. Meanwhile, what had the Lord Jesus decided to do? He, - God, in human form, weary from the day’s activity, - was already lying in a quiet and peaceful place on the boat, and ... *He was sleeping.* Imagine the Saviour asleep! Imagine His mind at rest and at peace. Imagine, the things of earth for Him having grown strangely dim as His eyes were closed, sleeping ... Imagine the Lord peacefully stretched out, resting. ... The One Who in the beginning was the Word, Who is God, the same was in the beginning with God (Jn. 1:1,2) ... the One, *v.3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made ...*

This same Jesus ... He was so tired, - physically and even spiritually, - He had fallen asleep. In a very intimate way, Ps. 103:14 he knoweth our frame because He took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:7). Could you see Herod or Pilate lying there sleeping as Jesus lay sleeping? No, I daresay they would not have rested in such a lowly place ... and yet we see our Lord and our God, being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself (v.8). ... And He was lying asleep while His disciples discussed the issues of the day.

“Peter, John, James ... where’s Jesus?” I could imagine them talking away to each other at the front of the boat, and slightly turning round to answer me ... with a quick response, “Oh, He’s resting over there!” ... I could imagine them being so busy talking about other issues ... maybe about some of the things Jesus was saying earlier as He taught them through the parables. I can imagine it wouldn’t have taken much to get these men started in a discussion, or even an argument! I would imagine if John and Peter started at each other the boat would have been rocking without any winds and waves! ... I suppose they also had other ordinary everyday issues to talk about ... their families ... the new decision to follow Jesus. ... Meanwhile, Jesus was sleeping ... completely at peace ... the water gently lapping against the sides of the boat.

Look at Him again ... He was silent. His voice had been bellowing out over the crowds earlier that day ... but it was silent now. His eyes were closed. His heart was beating gently. ... It must have been one of the most peaceable occasions, as Heaven looked on.

As He slept, suddenly, there arose a great storm of wind (v.37), and the boat began to rock from side to side. The waves became so ferocious the water started to come in over the bows. They could hardly see a few feet in front of them ... it was so rough! This was more serious than the storms they were used to! It was becoming increasingly furious, and they didn’t know how to cope! Not even the experienced fishermen among them knew what to do! ... At this point, let’s draw a comparison ...

Some of us have been saved for many years. We’ve been in many ‘storms’. On many occasions the waters of fear and doubt have threatened to come over the sides and sink our feeble vessels. ... It might even be that this is your experience today! The first thing many of us do is to try and throw the water out ourselves.

By our own human effort we frantically fight against the great storms and we try in vain to keep the waters from raging in the storm ... but how often we find it is so futile! It is too much for us to contend with! ... We fear we shall sink. And like the psalmist we cry in desperation, 6:2 I am weak ... my bones are vexed. 3 My soul is also sore vexed.

And we also look at our church ... and we fear for how the work may be carried on here because, - on the face of it ... like so many other fellowships throughout the land ... we fear the end of the work is in sight and there's nothing we can do about it! We're getting older ... and the way we see it, the church is going to die with us! When we're finished, it will be finished too! There's no one else coming in to 'take it on' after us ... and, besides, they wouldn't carry on the work the way we would want them to! ... We might as well turn the lights out and lock the door behind us! ... Is that how you see it sometimes?!

Let's return to the boat ... If Jesus was tired, why weren't the disciples tired also? Okay, they weren't doing the teaching and preaching, but they had also other responsibilities that would have drained their energy ... So, why weren't they taking the opportunity to rest? ... Sometimes we don't take advantage of the blessings God gives us, and we become the weaker for it! ... What would have been so important as to keep those men awake?! ... Why didn't they follow the example of the Master, and use that journey across the Sea of Galilee, and gain rest. Often we make ourselves busy doing things we have no need to do, and then when we need our strength, - spiritual and physical, - we're lacking!

And there are other winds blowing too ... There are the winds of liberal Christianity battering our boat. They are trying to get us to set aside the Scriptures and our respect for God. They are trying to get us to 'fall in behind' the ways of the world, and open up the doors to 'whatever takes your fancy'! Then, when the storm *really* begins to blow, the waves of doubt and unbelief and liberalism start to come in over the sides, ... and we're not prepared! We're out in the middle of the sea ... and far from the safety of the shore! ... And we are exposed to the prevailing winds of the enemy.

There's something, - as believers, - we need to take account of though ... There's *Someone* we're forgetting. Yes, He is in the *hinder* part of the ship, but He's there nonetheless. ... He's *asleep on a pillow* ... but, praise God, He is there! ...

The waves that batter against me, and the winds that try to blow me off course, and the waters that are trying to sink my ship ... *my Saviour is on board!* ... Will any ship that has the Saviour on board ever sink?! Will the winds blow it off course, that it becomes lost, when He's on board?! ... No, there is no fear ... Maybe now we're beginning to grasp there's more truth in the children's chorus than we originally thought ... "With Christ in the vessel"!

Some of you have suffered serious illnesses. Some of you are presently dealing with difficult family issues that are keeping you awake at night. Some of you have worries too personal to mention to anyone ... but take heart in this ... as a child of God, you have the Saviour on board! The same Saviour Who promises, Heb. 13:5 *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee* ... Mt. 28:20 *I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*

Look again into the boat ... No matter how hard they tried to battle against the winds ... and to keep the floods of water out ... they saw the sails bending and fearing they would break ... they couldn't see ahead, and the winds could be blowing them onto the rocks at any time ... And yet, while all this was going on, *in the hinder part of the ship* Christ was *asleep on a pillow*. But, instead of going to Him, they tried themselves in vain, - they wasted their energy, - to battle against the elements. ... I wonder if the reason they didn't disturb Him was because they doubted His power ... Maybe they thought, "What can Jesus do? He's only a carpenter, we need an experienced sailor!" They wouldn't have said it openly, - but it seems to have been they might have been thinking it, - ... Jesus isn't up to the task!

... How often you and I have tried to steer a course that we have been so inadequate for! We've sailed ourselves into more trouble and into more heavy winds ... and instead of improving the situation, we have made it worse. ... Where is the Hope we trust in? ... Where is the Hope we trust in for the future of our fellowship? ... Is He on the hills of Judea? Is He away far in Jerusalem? ... No, He's not ... He's here with us in the boat! ... The psalmist rejoiced, Ps. 31:24 *Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD.*

What is the option? ... If you don't put your faith in the Lord, what is your option?! ... Here is your option ... there is the cry that comes from within you and you have lost the sight of your faith, and you shout out at God, - to your shame, - *Master, carest thou not that we perish?* ... To our shame, we often don't trust Him as we ought!

I don't think they fully realised Who they had with them. I don't think it dawned on them the significance that if they were to perish, Jesus would too! ... And do you think the same Jesus Who has the whole world in His hands can perish? ... The One the Jewish leaders and Roman soldiers tried to 'finish-off' forever on the cross ... could they ever have managed it? Of course, they couldn't! ... And this was the same Saviour Who said to His disciples, *Jn. 15:4 Abide in me, and I in you.*

And notice they eventually realised they needed Jesus, and they didn't have to shake Him to awaken Him. Neither did they have to tell or explain to Him the direness of their situation ... He already knew. ... *v.39 And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. 40 And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? ... Another chorus says, "My Lord knows the way through the wilderness, All I have to do is follow ... Strength for today is mine always, And all that I need for tomorrow" ...*

When you and I have such a great God and Saviour ... how could we not have faith in Him? How could we ever doubt His power to save and to keep?! The faith you and I share is not something you switch on and switch off, depending upon the severity of the circumstances ... It is the faith Paul describes, *I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day (II Tim. 1:12)?*

Perhaps the most precious teaching of Scripture is the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. God is King ... He is in charge and in control of all things. Nothing ever escapes His attention, and nothing ever can overrule or interfere with His plans and purposes. ... Not even if those winds had been a hundred times stronger, and not even if those waves had risen ten times higher than the sails would those disciples have been harmed ... because they had Christ in the vessel!

I wouldn't be so presumptuous as to insist or even suggest that, - because you are a Christian, - all you have got to do is '*smile at the storm*' because the storms are nothing to smile about. If you are being battered about and you're frightened, what I do want to remind you though is that Christ is in the vessel with you. And I would like to suggest we change one single letter in the question He asked, - and I don't think it takes away from our study, - ... but read verse forty like this, "Why are *we* so fearful? How is it that *we* have no faith?" Surely that is the crux!

And do you notice too Jesus didn't say to them, "How is it that ye have *little faith*?" ... Instead, He confronted the true core of their problem of fear, *how is it that ye have no faith*?! ... "Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, Just to take Him at His word; Just to rest upon His promise; Just to know, Thus saith the Lord. ... Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him, How I've proved Him o'er and o'er, Jesus, Jesus, Precious Jesus! O for grace to trust Him more. ... I'm so glad I learned to trust Thee, [*... and how did I learn? I learned because His Word promises me ...*] Precious Jesus, Saviour, Friend; And I know that Thou art with me, Wilt be with me to the end. ... Rom. 8:28 For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose ... 31 ... If God be for us, who can be against us? 32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

In the eye of the storm ... What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? ... 5:1 And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. ... "For all the Lord has done for me, I never will cease to praise Him." Amen!

[Please also read Spurgeon's sermon on this wonderful subject ... <http://www.spurgeon.org/vols19-21/chs1121.pdf>]