

16. Jesus Calms the Storm

INTRODUCTION

In reading the Gospels, you often find mention of a body of water sometimes called the Sea of Galilee, sometimes the Sea of Tiberius and sometimes Lake Gennesaret. And then sometimes it is called simply “the sea.” It is on the edge of this body of water or in the surrounding area that a good part of Jesus’ ministry took place. It is 21 kilometers long, 12 kilometers across and 42-48 meters deep. It is rich in fish and provides revenue for many fishing boats. It is also very unpredictable.

The winds that come down from the surrounding mountains burst on the lake suddenly and with great violence, transforming its smooth and tranquil surface. Like a boiling cauldron, the sea in its fury is capable of putting terror in the heart of the most experienced sailor. It was with such a tempest that the disciples of Jesus were faced in Mark 4:1,2,35-41.

“And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea. Then He taught them many things by parables... 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 wind-storm 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!’”

THE FIRST FEAR

In this story, we see that the disciples of Jesus were very afraid because of the storm. In spite of their experience with boats on the lake—or perhaps because of that experience—they saw themselves in great danger. The waves covered the small open boat and it was filling quickly. Such a violent storm could bring death to all of them. We can understand their fear. Certainly, we would also be afraid in the same situation.

Jesus, however, reproached them for their fear. “Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?” Actually, a small detail should have changed the attitude of his followers: asleep on a cushion in the stern of the boat was Jesus, the one whom they had recognized to be a great prophet of God, perhaps even THE prophet whose coming had been promised 15 centuries earlier. The presence of Jesus should have changed everything for them. They had seen numerous proofs that God was with this man in an extraordinary way. Who could doubt that Jesus had a mission to accomplish for the Lord? Would God allow His chosen one to be drowned without accomplishing what he was sent to do? Certainly not! No water could swallow a boat with Jesus in it. So why this doubt? Why this lack of faith?

The answer is found in the nature of faith, or the nature of man himself. Faith in Christ is not a kind of blind belief, a decision to think a thing is true even if we have no arguments, no evidence, no valid reasons to think this way. There are many reasons to accept that Christianity is true.

But as the English author C.S. Lewis said, one must not suppose that the human mind is compelled to continue believing a thing is true until a good reason appears to question the belief. We must not suppose that the human mind is governed completely by reason. This is simply not the case.

For example, my mind is perfectly convinced by good evidence that anesthesia will not suffocate me and that the surgeon will not begin the operation until I am unconscious. But that does not change at

all the fact that when they put me on the operating table and place the mask on my face, a childish panic takes hold of me. I begin to think that I might be suffocated and that they will begin cutting before I am completely asleep. In other words, I lose my faith in anesthesia. It is not reason or an analysis of facts that removes my faith. On the contrary, my faith is based on reason. It is logical. My imagination and my emotions are the things that would rob me of my faith. The battle is between faith and reason on one side, and imagination and emotions on the other side.

Suppose a man hears the Gospel and is led by his analysis of the evidence to believe that the Bible is truly the Word of God and that Jesus is really the Son of God. He decides to give up the sins in which he has been living; he confesses before others that he believes; he submits to baptism to ask God to forgive his sins. I can tell you what will happen in the weeks to come.

A moment will come when this man receives bad news, or he will have troubles, or he will be among people who do not believe, or he will find himself in the midst of a great storm, and suddenly his emotions will attack his faith. Or the moment will come when he wants to have relations with a woman who is not his wife, or he wants to lie, or he will be presented with an opportunity to make money easily but dishonestly. In other words, there will be a moment where it might suit him better if Christianity were not true. He will not be facing proofs against the claims of Jesus but will be facing his own emotions and desires. And once again, his feelings and desires will attempt to drown his faith.

Now faith, in the sense that we are using the word, is the ability to hang onto truths that your rational mind has accepted, to hang on in spite of your changing moods and in spite of your desires. Let's repeat this: Faith is the ability to hold onto truths which your reason has accepted, to hold on despite your emotions, desires, and moods of the moment. Because moods will change, no matter what your beliefs are.

In the passage we are considering, the disciples had decided to put their faith in Jesus. But the problem of the storm raised emotions in them that

went against their faith. In a moment of crisis, they were frightened, they got into a panic and Jesus approached them gently, "How is it that you have no faith?"

THE SECOND FEAR

But this passage tells us of another fear that seized the disciples. After having seen the miracle that Jesus did, they exclaimed, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!" This fear had nothing to do with the idea that Jesus might hurt them, as they had feared that the sea might gobble them up. This second fear was produced by the manifestation of a power such as they had never seen, that was other-worldly, that was not natural.

We know that man has always been more or less at the mercy of the forces of nature. Man cannot cause an earthquake or tornado to be generated. He can neither end a prolonged drought nor stop pouring rains that sometimes flood whole regions.

Imagine a man who does not reach even two meters in height, very small in comparison to the immense black clouds that pour heavy rains, that are pushed by terrible winds that wail and tear sails, a man who is so small compared to the giant waves which rise up several meters over the boat and which fall down upon it with crushing force. Imagine a man in such a situation who stands up to tell the wind and the sea to be quiet and calm down. One might as well tell the sun not to shine. Man simply does not have authority over the forces of nature. He can do works that modify, generally for the worst, the climate or landscape, but his simple word has no effect on the weather.

Seeing Jesus in the middle of the storm, giving orders to the wind and the waves, and seeing the wind and the waves obey him immediately, the disciples could not help from asking themselves, "Who is this man?" Certainly this is no ordinary man. But if this is not God himself, the one who created the wind and the waves, who else could make them obey him? The disciples saw themselves in the presence of an authority and power beyond their understanding, and this made them afraid.

This was a normal reaction. When God called Isaiah to be his prophet, He allowed him to see a vision of His majesty and glory. Isaiah's reaction was not one of pride that he had been chosen by God, but rather a profound humility and even fear: "So I said, 'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts'" (Isaiah 6:5). The disciples in the boat with Jesus were equally frightened, because they began to understand the grandeur of the person with whom they were associating.

CONCLUSION

In life, we often have the impression of being, like the disciples, in the midst of a storm. Our very existence is threatened. We are powerless before the circumstances we must face. We, or those we

cherish, are in danger. If Jesus is in the boat with us, if he is in our lives, we must not be afraid—that is, we need not experience the first kind of fear we have discussed. Jesus has promised to be with us if we remain in his word. Nothing can separate us from his love. Nothing can happen to us that he is not able to prevent.

If he allows the storm for a while, it is not to destroy us but to cleanse us or teach us to depend on him. He wants our glory and eternal happiness, not our destruction. Why should we be afraid?

If you have not entrusted your life to Jesus yet, it is time for you to consider the one whom wind and waves obey, to understand his greatness, to fear him—in the sense of an amazed respect for him. Jesus is not a mere doer of miracles. He is not a charlatan. He is a prophet—but so much more than a prophet.