



Sunday, January 31, 2021

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Message in Word: “In the Midst of the Storm”

(Scripture reference Matthew 8:23-26)

Thank you for joining us today—in person or by streaming. It’s an understatement to say it’s been quite a year. Politically, this past year has been the most contentious since the Civil War. Then there’s the pandemic which could probably best be described as confusion. No one really seems to have enough solid, factual data to give us clear direction about what we should do. Instead of facts, the media seems to be made up of spin doctors who have ulterior motives. Our government is far more concerned with getting power than caring for the people. Facebook and Twitter have become so large and wealthy they have the power to control what we can and can’t see online. Our Constitution was written based on Christian principles and was always intended to be governed by people of character, integrity, and high morals and, therefore, will not be understood by a non-Christian society. We are most certainly in a post-Christian era in the United States, and some are beginning to label our times “post constitutional” which is frightening. However, we are not to be dismayed at the storm because God is still on His throne, He is still in control, and none of this caught God unprepared.

What has happened very simply is we have followed in Israel’s footsteps in obedience to the Lord. Proverbs 14:34 says “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” God promised Israel that if they followed Him and walked closely with Him, He would bless them. But if they left Him and went in different directions, He would punish them severely. Deuteronomy 11:26-28 says: “²⁶Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse. ²⁷The blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you today: ²⁸and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known.” This is what we have done. God always keeps His word, and there has never been a nation that disobeyed God as much as we have and escape punishment. We are in a storm of our own choosing and are reaping what we have sown. Matthew 8:23-26 says: “²³When He was entered into the boat, His disciples followed Him. ²⁴And behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea inasmuch as the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. ²⁵And His disciples came to Him and awoke Him saying, “Lord, save us! We perish!” ²⁶And He saith unto them **Why are fearful, O ye of little faith?** Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.”

Jesus has just finished giving a series of sermons to great crowds of people. One audience was so large that He had to stand in a boat just off-shore in order for the people to both hear and see Him. Remember, Jesus was fully human as well as fully God, and He had been ministering and speaking to multitudes for a long time; He must have been exhausted. After He gave the command for the disciples to sail the boat across the Sea of Galilee, He fell asleep on a cushion. While He slept, a storm arose. This isn’t unusual because of how the Sea of Galilee is situated. It’s in a low-lying rift of a valley, surrounded by hills which can produce sudden, violent storms. In fact, the Sea is notorious for the violent waves stirred up by west winds funneling through the hills around it. As this storm increases in intensity, I’m sure the disciples were growing more and more anxious and afraid for their lives. At some point, the storm became so dangerous that great waves were literally breaking over the ship; the disciples were at risk of being washed overboard and drowned. In their despair, they woke up the Lord. I think, sadly, it’s very revealing they didn’t ask Jesus for help when they woke Him up which would have demonstrated faith in Him. What they did was immediately accuse Him of sleeping and not caring about them (typical human behavior). Doubt, fear, and a feeling of betrayal seem to have been in the disciples’ minds. Jesus simply said to their questions and accusations “O ye of little faith, why were you afraid?” Then He rebuked the storm and instantaneously there was calm. I think possibly for the very first time, the disciples begin to have a clear picture of who it was they were following—not only a man who spoke great words and performed miracles of healing but even a man who nature paid attention to.

What are the lessons here—for people in a storm? First, if Jesus tells us to do something that should end any discussion or debate we might have. The outcome of our obedience isn’t really any of our business because only the Lord understands what He’s telling us to do. We must go to Scripture; we must filter every thought, every decision, and every action and follow what Scripture says. In our recent situation, if we voted for Biblical values and worked hard to get them passed and have done

everything the Lord has led us to do in order to keep people safe from the pandemic, I would suggest the outcome is God's business even if we don't understand it. And I don't! I feel sure the disciples had no idea why Jesus would lead them into a storm, but the fact remains—He did. God's purposes are rarely clear further ahead of us than the very next step. Faith is exercised when we take each step not knowing where it leads or even understanding it.

Second, Jesus was not asleep in the boat because He didn't care what happened to His disciples. Even while He was sleeping, He was demonstrating a very powerful Scriptural principle. The "peace of God that passes all understanding" does not come from the lack of storms. It comes from total trust and faith in the Lord in the middle of the storms. Jesus could sleep because He knew and trusted His Father, and He wanted His disciples to have that same faith and trust in Him. I think they failed the test! 1John 4:18 says "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear because fear has torment. He who fears has not been made perfect in love."

Third, there is nothing more powerful than God. He is the Lord, not the storm. In Psalm 43:5, the psalmist says "Why are thou cast down, O my soul? And why are thou disquieted within me? Hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." I know these are difficult, confusing, and indescribable times. We've never been here before. I want us to be encouraged in the middle of it all—not because of the circumstances should we be encouraged but because of who is in control of the circumstances. As human beings, we tend to view the severity of a situation by our ability to change it. We should be viewing it by God's ability to change it. I am not sitting around thinking "woe is our church." Either God will deliver us and we shall come through the refining process as gold or if this is indeed the opening act of the end, then our salvation is closer than we first believed—that's a win-win. We should be looking up, excited to see how God's going to work this out.

Before Pastor Jeffrey preaches, he asks every single time "Did you come today expecting something?" We should approach every problem in our lives expecting to see how God's going to take care of this one. How is He going to fix this one? He constantly surprises and lifts us up with unexpected and unexplainable deliverances—but, we have to be expecting them. I wonder if people's dismay and concern doesn't come from a misconception of God. A. W. Tozer, one of my favorite preachers from the past, said "A right conception of God is basic, not only to systematic theology, but to practical Christian living as well." Whatever comes into our mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us. Tozer is saying if we believe God loves us, is all-powerful and in control of everything, we're going to react with expectant faith in hard times and not slip into the temptation of contentious despair.

In the Bible, a person's name was a literal definition of who they were. For example, Jacob meant "deceiver"—that was his character for a long time. Esau meant "red"; he was a red and hairy man. Do we wonder who our God really is? Let's check out some of His names: "El Roi" the God who sees. "Jehovah Jireh" the Lord shall provide. "Jehovah Rapha" the Lord that healeth. "Jehovah Shammah" the Lord is there. "Elohim" the strong and faithful one. My point is the times and situations in which we find ourselves do not define us. The God we serve defines us. He's not been surprised by the election results, the pandemic, the moral decline in our country, or the socialist agenda of the left. He is in control! Any un-Christian power that seems to be in charge momentarily is there only by God's permission for His purposes, whether they realize it or not. You can see that throughout the Bible. As Christians, we're in a time that the military might call a "target-rich" environment. We can complain and feel sorry for ourselves, or we can reach out with the gospel to the lost world around us; we have plenty of lost around us to reach out to. Let's find them; let's live before them as Christ would have us do. Let's treat them with love but stand firm on the presentation of the Gospel. They will accept it based on the love they receive from us, if they see it. We live in a country that has become one of the most difficult mission fields in the world. We have been so blessed for so long that people believe they're self-sufficient and accomplished all on their own—we call it "entitlement." They believe they're blessed because they earned it, and, therefore they deserve it. This is both idolatry and blasphemy.

I would suggest that precisely because our country has declined spiritually, we have a tremendous opportunity to show people who Christ is by our lives, our love, our actions. In John 16:1-4, Jesus speaks of times like these **"¹These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. ²They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he doeth God service. ³And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. ⁴But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them."**

The point being: we don't have to be afraid. We can be assured that the one who created everything—the omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent God—only knew this time would come and has already prepared a path through it for us and the victory over it with us. We should walk boldly in the joy of our salvation and not focus on the fallen world around us. I enjoy listening to Carmen, a contemporary Christian singer. The lyrics to one of his songs remind me of Satan trying to get into this world: “When troubles try to bury you and make it hard to pray, it may seem like Friday night but Sunday’s on the way.”

Folks, Sunday is on the way! My salvation is near when I believe. Why aren't we acting like it? Be encouraged! God has got this! Our calling is spiritual; that rises far above earthly politics, pandemics, or problems of any kind. To walk in joy, regardless of the situation, will require we do it God's way. We find in our manual of life, the Bible, to always be full of joy in the Lord. “Rejoice, and again I say, rejoice” (Philippians 4:4). Let everyone see you're considerate in all you do. Remember the Lord is coming soon. Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He's done. His peace which exceeds anything we can understand will guard our hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. In today's world that seems impossible to comprehend. The Apostle Paul tells brothers and sisters “...to fix their thoughts on what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you've learned and received from me and everything you saw me do, then the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:8-9). Our first reaction to these words might be that we're simply ignoring reality if we think that way, but that's not the truth. Scripture doesn't teach us to only be joyful and praise God when things are going good for us. We read in 1Thessalonians 5:16-18 to “always be joyful, never stop praying, be thankful in all circumstances for this is the will of God for those who belong to Christ Jesus.” We're instructed and even commanded to walk in praise, faith, thanksgiving with the Lord in every situation of our life whether it seems good, bad, or otherwise. We're to be known for our love, easy to spot in a crowd due to our joyful and positive attitude regardless of what's happening.

I say again—be encouraged; God's got this. His arm has not shortened that He cannot deliver us. Lay down the weight of fear, worry, and frustration and place them in the hands of the One who has known the end from the beginning. Of course, we have the responsibility to stand firm in whatever way the Lord leads. We need to remember whose battle it is and make sure we're following His leading. We're required to stand firm in a way that's pleasing to Him, instead of us.

I'll give you a personal analogy as to how we should see our situations. One of my favorite activities is riding my motorcycle. Because of the noise and attention that's required, you have to focus and not be thinking of anything else or you might get some “road rash!” You have to pay attention, but there's freedom in riding the winding roads such as the Blue Ridge Parkway. One of the first lessons I had to learn was from my brother—you can't look at the ground in front of the front tire to make sure you're riding correctly; you'll wreck almost immediately. That's because you're focused on where you are instead of where you're going. So as in church, we have to look ahead at the coming turns with our eyes focused on where we'll be and not where we are. If we look our way through the road's twists and turns, we'll keep the bike in proper position to the highway. It's the same way in life—if we keep our attention on the current problems and negatives, frustrations and disappointments, we'll be too focused on where we are instead of where we're going. God needs us to look ahead and be happy, faithful, and joyful because of what's coming. We should be lifting our voices in praise to God in faith for what He is **going** to do—not what He might or possibly could do. It's with certainty and it's written in history that we haven't seen yet. When we praise Him, our countenance, attitude, and actions will indicate that.

A real world example of how terrible circumstances can be faced with joy and thanksgiving is found in the story of Corrie ten Boom and her sister, Betsy (“The Hiding Place” is the name of the book). They were imprisoned in a German concentration camp, Ravensbrück, during World War II. Corrie, Betsy, and their father were arrested by the German Army for hiding Jews and smuggling them out of Holland. Corrie and Betsy were in barracks—a massive square platform, stacked three levels high, and housed hundreds of women. They were so close together that people had to walk single file to pass between them. Rancid straw was scattered over the platform; fleas infested the area. Corrie could not sit up straight without hitting her head on the level above her. Through a miracle, Corrie had been able to smuggle a small Bible into the barracks. When they were brought to Ravensbrück, all the prisoners had to strip off all their clothes. Betsy had the Bible tied on a small string behind her and prayed “Lord, please don't let the guards see it.” And they didn't—the miracle of blinding their eyes. So in the barracks they began to have Bible study. Betsy came upon the passage in 1 Thessalonians 5 “to be thankful in all things.” Corrie said, Betsy, “I am not going to be thankful for fleas!” A few days later, one of the women noticed the guards never came in to

inspect the barracks. When asked why, the guards said they wouldn't go in because of the fleas. God sent the fleas to give Corrie and Betsy the freedom to study the Bible and share the gospel!

Sometimes we misunderstand contemporary problems that eventually turn out to be our salvation. I think we're in a refining of the church and how we come through it depends on what we're expecting. Do we praise God or just look where we're standing? Regardless of how dark circumstances seem, God is still in control.

Dr. Jerry Falwell, Sr. said "God takes lemons and makes lemonade if you'll let Him." I like that. We need to repent of frustrations and desperate attempts to control outcomes. Look to the Lord and trust Him to work out everything to His good. I believe we should be praising Him for His victory over the current situation even before we see a change. Praise, in my opinion, may be the purest form of faith. Praise is choosing to believe and trust God to the point where we're thanking Him in advance for what we cannot see in the moment. Because of His character, because He has never lied, because He's never failed, because He's never not fulfilled a promise He made—how can we miss the consistency of a record like that? Sincere praise seems to release the power of the Lord in amazing ways; this should not surprise us! Because every single thing you receive from the Lord is through faith. You are saved through faith, come to repentance through faith, get answers to your problems through faith, directions for the next step through faith. If we don't apply faith, we will not receive the promise. If we do not see the promise, that would be our choice and not God's fault.

Regardless of politics, pandemics, and problems—I'm saying again, God has got this! He will not fail. As I close today, take a few moments and forget the noise, distractions, and disappointments in our country and focus internally on our own souls. Whenever people stand still long enough and get quiet enough, they have to face themselves. When we do that, we see who we are—not the people we try to let other people see but the people we really are like a shadow in the back of our minds even when awake. Who are we when no one is looking? Are we faithful? What are your hurts and fears? What keeps you awake at night and follows you throughout the day? Every single person here today and watching by live streaming has needs, issues, and problems. My God has the answer to every single one of them, and I praise Him for that. Some may be Christians who've gone off track somewhere and their life is confused and unsettled. Some of you may have never gotten the peace you seek because you've never accepted the Author of Peace into your life—Jesus Christ. That only comes through salvation. We live in a fallen world; there will be difficulties that are spiritual, relational, emotional, financially, mentally, physical, etc. Know there is peace to be had in one place—Jesus.

Consider who you are; don't play games with yourself. You've either accepted Christ and have His peace, or you have not and you do not. There is no other way to come to peace than through the Lord Jesus Christ. I would suggest you receive Him; the Holy Spirit is wherever you're listening exactly like He's right here. God is not bound by boundaries; He is there. If you invite Jesus into your heart, He will answer. If you're a Christian and need an answer from the Lord or deliverance in something, He is right there to answer if you kneel in faith in your heart. The position of your body has nothing to do with it; your heart has everything to do with it.

Let Us Pray: Father God, remove me from the words you gave me this morning. Let your Holy Spirit move in power—whatever the need someone has. First, we pray for the salvation of people who do not know You yet. I pray for people here in the sanctuary and listening from a different place that they will hear You speak to them. Forget me; let them hear the Holy Spirit. Move in power, Father, and do what You want in the hearts of those listening. In Christ's name. Amen.