

Storms Will Come – Matthew 14:22-33

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Teaching & Testing

1. We have a lot of school teachers here at CC, much higher percentage than is typical.
2. We also have many home school families.
3. And one of the things all those who teach know is that after a period of teaching, comes *testing*.

B. For Disciples

1. What's true in the classroom is true in *life* as the Lord teaches us about Himself and His ways.
2. So in Matthew 14 we find Jesus teaching His disciples about His power & love in the feeding of the 5000.
 - a. His *love* was manifest in His *concern* for their hunger.
 - b. His *power* revealed in His taking just a few loaves & fishes and multiplying them to provide a feast for thousands.
3. In this lesson, Jesus had made *them*, the 12 disciples, the agents of His provision to the people.
 - a. they were the ones who'd stood next to Him as He blessed & broke the food.
 - b. they watched it multiply in His hands.
 - c. then they took it to the people till all were full, & gathered up several large baskets of leftovers.
4. They had to be thinking, "What's next? What amazing thing will Jesus do now?"
5. They had no idea! In fact, Matthew makes it clear that when Jesus told them what was next, they didn't like it at all!

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 22-23

22 Immediately Jesus made [compelled] His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away.

1. Matthew makes it clear here that the disciples *balked* at Jesus' command they get in the boat and go on ahead *without* Him. He had to *demand* that they go.
2. After seeing the miracle of the loaves and fishes, they wanted to stay as close to Him as possible.
 - a. He was a handy guy to have around!
 - b. and besides, what other miracle might they miss out on if they weren't with Him?
3. But Jesus had an important lesson for them to learn, & they could only learn it by their *not seeing Him physically present with them* – so He sent them on

ahead.

23 And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there.

4. Once the disciples had set off, Jesus turned to the multitude that was still hanging around & told them to go home – His time of ministry to them was now complete.
 - a. they'd been healed & fed; they'd been given His teaching about the Kingdom of God.
 - c. it was time for them to return to their homes & daily lives & decide how they would respond to all the truth and evidence they'd been given.
5. Once the crowd departed, Jesus went up onto one of the many hills that overlook the Lake of Galilee. There, finally alone, He prayed.

B. Vs. 24-27

24 But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

1. At its widest, the Galilee Lake is 8 miles and if the winds are right, you can make it across pretty quickly.
 - a. but if the winds are contrary, it can be quite a chore rowing against them.
 - b. because of the surrounding geography, intense storms occasionally whip up & come down on the lake with great force.
 - c. that's what happened here – the disciples found themselves facing a storm and stiff wind that hindered their progress.
2. They toiled all night at the oars and were still only half way across.

25 Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. ²⁶ And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled [terrified], saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear.

3. The 4th watch is from 3 to 6 a.m.. This means the disciples had been struggling to cross the lake for at least 8 and more probably 9 to 10 hours!
 - a. you can just imagine how tired, sore, and frustrated they must have been.
 - b. if the storm was fierce enough, they may have even been fearful the ship would capsize!
 - c. being as tired as they were and in the *middle* of the lake, they would not have been able to swim for shore and they knew it.
4. So there they are, exhausted and fearful, when all of a sudden, something *even more terrifying* than the storm appears to them.
5. They see what they take to be a *ghost* coming across the storm-tossed waves!
 - a. the word Matthew uses here refers, not to a *spirit*, but to a *spectral image*, something evil.
 - b. the fishermen among the disciples were well acquainted with the sailor's lore of ghosts who came on the water to sink ships and drag the men into the depths.
 - c. their exhausted imaginations, inflamed by fear, filter what they see through

- this lens of terror, so they cry out that the end has come.
- d. that last phrase of v. 26, **“And they cried out for fear,”** speaks of a shriek of total panic. **“We’re all gonna die!”**
6. But no! Death is not what Jesus had planned -
- 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.”**
7. While they’re going all to pieces, certain the end has come and crying out in total panic, Jesus draws alongside and simply says, “Cheer up boys! Look – it’s Me! Don’t freak out!”
8. Mark’s rendition of this same story tells us that as Jesus was alone on the hill praying, He was watching them in the boat and knew all about their struggle and the danger they were in.
9. He waited until precisely *this moment* to come to them.
- a. Why? Why would He wait until they were exhausted and fearful?
- b. He waited because this was both a *test, & another lesson* all at the same time.
10. The disciples had just witnessed His power & love in the feeding of the 5000.
- a. would they *remember it* when they needed to?
- b. when they were in need would they trust in His power and love to sustain them?
11. They were in *that boat*, in the middle of *that lake*, and in the midst of *that storm* all because they were *obeying Jesus!*
- a. their *exhaustion* was the result of their obedience to Him.
- b. but what about the *fear*? Was that also the result of obedience?
- c. no! *Fear* was the very thing Jesus wanted them to confront & defeat.
- d. they needed to learn that just because Jesus wasn’t *physically present* with them His love & power was no less real & present to preserve them.
12. Though they couldn’t *see Him* for the wind & waves – *His eye was on them* the whole time as He sat on the hill.
13. And what was He doing the entire time they were struggling away in the storm? Praying!
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14. Following Jesus is not a guarantee of a trouble free life.
- a. if that’s what you thought becoming a Christian meant – sorry to disappoint you.
- b. Christianity is not about a comfy, cozy ride in a pillow-filled sleigh through snowy fields of fun.
- c. it’s often an exhausting night in a storm-tossed boat traveling through dark & scary waters.
- d. those who think Christianity is a crutch know nothing of the life of a true disciple!
15. Jesus made this wonderful promise to His followers, “In the world you shall have tribulation.” But then He added this word of victory – “But be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world!”
16. As we follow Jesus, as we obey His commands & leading, just as the disciples obeyed Him & got into the boat, *we* will pass through storms, severe trials.
- a. the winds will be contrary for days, weeks, maybe even months.

- b. there will be moments when being a disciple will leave us *exhausted!*
 - b. there may even be times when we'll be tempted to *despair of life*.
17. You see, we are in the school of discipleship. And in this school, there are two kinds of storms we will pass through.
- a. there's the storm of *correction*.
 - 1) this comes because of some *error*, some *weakness* in us that needs to be *disciplined*.
 - 2) it often happens that the trials we endure are of our own making –
 - 3) we are simply reaping what we, in our sin & foolishness have sown.
 - 4) God allows us to experience the bitter fruit of our own choices so that we might learn not to repeat them.
 - 5) the storms of *correction- discipline* us.
 - b. but then there are the storms of *perfection*.
 - 1) these come, not to discipline, but to *develop* us.
 - 2) faith is something that is only strengthened by being worked, stretched, challenged.
 - 3) faith grows in the midst of struggle – and faith is what God is seeking to develop in us.
 - 4) so the storm comes & *perfects* us.
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18. This storm the disciples were in was not a *storm of correction*; it was a *storm of perfection*.
- a. they'd just been taught a profound lesson about the power and love of God in the feeding of the 5000,
 - b. they now needed to learn that the power and love of God was no less present with them when Jesus was not physically there, than when He was.
 - c. and the reason they needed to learn that lesson was because it wouldn't be all that much longer until He was permanently taken from them.
 - d. their discipleship would go on, even though He would not longer be physically present with them.
 - e. and as they followed Him, they would know further storms – even more trying than this one on the lake.
 - f. there's an interesting story in the Book of Acts, ch. 4.
 - 1) we read that at the preaching of the Apostles, 5000 were added to the church.
 - 2) the very next words describe the outbreak of a fierce persecution that came upon them.
19. Jesus knew this future lay before them. The only way they would be able to endure the *firestorm of persecution* to come was by enduring *this storm at sea*.
20. But He didn't want them to just tough it out in their own strength.
21. On the contrary – He wanted them to realize that the essence of discipleship, the bottom line of all obedience, is living by faith in His presence – even when He isn't visible!
- a. they couldn't see Him, but His eye was ever on them.
 - b. & the entire time they were struggling at the oars, what was Jesus doing?
 - c. He was on the mount praying for them!

22. In the same way, though we cannot see Jesus, He sees us! His eye is fixed on us, and as **Hebrews 7:25** says -
- [Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.**
- a. Jesus is on the heavenly mount, praying for us as we go through the storms of correction and perfection.
 - b. and, He will always come to rescue us before we flounder and go under.
 - c. He's just waiting till we've struggled to the end of ourselves, of our own strength & ingenuity.
 - d. then He comes to bestow upon us His strength and carry us through.
23. The problem is, we often don't recognize Him when He comes in the midst of our trial.
- a. the disciples were terrified, thinking He was a ghost.
 - b. fear & exhaustion clouded their eyes.
24. The same can happen to us. We've been in the trial so long we can easily begin to doubt the Lord's goodness or power.
- a. "How could God allow this?" we ask. "Where is God?" we accuse!
 - b. and that insidious, ever-present little voice of the tempter we usually do such a good job ignoring suggests – "God is no where! He doesn't care about you! What's the use in following Jesus, fat-lot of good it's done you. Things were easier before you started this religion thing. Where is God now that you need Him? God is no where!"
25. That's exactly where the disciples were when Jesus came to them – and they were so caught up in their doubts and fears that when He came to them – **THEY DIDN'T RECOGNIZE HIM!**
26. The same thing happens to us in our storms.
- a. Jesus comes to us and we don't recognize Him.
 - b. He comes to us through a loved one who has a word of exhortation or comfort.
 - c. He comes to us through a message on the radio, or a card someone sends in the mail.
 - d. He comes to us through the Word in our quiet time – & He wants to speak to us, but we miss it because He's coming to us in a way we're not expecting, the way we might prefer He'd come.
 - e. when we're tempted to throw up our hands and say, "God is no where," we must stop and move the 'w.' The thought, "God is no where" is edited into the affirmation of faith, "God is *now here!*"
27. People often call and want to talk to one of the pastors because they find themselves in the midst of a storm they can't row out of.
- a. and they want us to throw them a life-preserver.
 - b. they hope that the pastor will give them the answer to their problem, will rescue them from their trial.
 - c. and so we'll ask them – have you sought the Lord about this?
 - 1) "Oh yes!" they say – "I've prayed."
 - 2) so we share with them the direction & counsel the Lord gives us.
 - 3) do you know how often they will say, "That's exactly what my wife/husband said." "That's what I thought the Lord was telling me."

“That’s what my friend said.”

28. The Lord comes to us, often in ways we do not expect or recognize. Like the disciples, we must learn to recognize the Lord, and not dismiss Him as nothing more than an apparition.
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C. Vs. 28-31

1. There’s one more part of this lesson to be learned from this story, and it’s taught us by Peter.
- 28 And Peter answered Him and said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” 29 So He said, “Come.” And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.**
2. Note carefully those last words; for they’re the key – Peter walked on the water **because he was going to Jesus.**
 3. All of a sudden, Peter grasped the point of all that had happened to them over the last few hours.
 - a. he realized the storm was no accident –
 - b. it was as much a manifestation of Jesus’ power as His multiplying the loaves and fishes and His ability to walk on water!
 - c. in a flash he perceived that Jesus was ***testing*** them to see if they really understood His power and authority.
 - d. he got it! – and wanted to follow through on this new-found enlightenment, so he literally took a step of faith and asked Jesus if he was drawing the right conclusion about all that was happening.
 - e. Jesus affirmed his insight and invited Peter to follow through by doing some barefoot skiing.
 - f. now – Peter stepped out of the boat by faith and ***while we walked in faith*** – moving toward Jesus, he experienced the Lord’s power operating in and through him. But, it didn’t last . . .
- 30 But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, “Lord, save me!” 31 And immediately Jesus stretched out *His* hand and caught him, and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”**
4. When Peter took his eyes off Jesus and put them on his circumstances, he floundered and went down.
 5. Friends, don’t think that there was something ***magical*** going on here-as though as long as Peter ***looked*** at Jesus he walked on water but when he looked away he sunk.
 - a. this wasn’t magic – it was about Peter’s heart!
 - b. as long as his heart was aimed at going to Jesus, regardless of the surroundings, then the circumstances would not hinder him – he would rise above them.
 - c. but when Peter’s ***heart*** was ***distracted*** from the Lord and was instead filled with the danger of his surroundings, he was overcome and the storm was once more a trial that troubled him.

6. The lesson is this: We often find ourselves going through the *same storm*, the *same trial* more than once.
 - a. God knows our *breaking point* & He will not crush us.
 - b. His goal is to *perfect us*, and if we do not learn the lesson a trial is meant to teach, then the trial will end for now, but be assured, it will come once more – for the lesson *must* be learned!
 - c. & a lesson once learned, can be *forgotten*, so must be learned *again*.
 - d. others lessons are of such a nature that we must learn them at a deeper & deeper level; so the trials keep coming like waves, one after another, but each a little higher than the one before.
7. Sometimes I feel like an onion – just different layers of stink, and God is peeling them off one by one.
8. Let me give an example of how, with some lessons, we find ourselves being taken deeper and deeper.
 - a. God wants to work the virtue of *patience* in us. He is *long-suffering* and wants to develop it in us so we may be children who look like their Father.
 - b. but patience can only be developed through a trial of needing to endure cheerfully – so we find ourselves in a sitch where we must be patient – say, being on hold on a call to your bank for 20 minutes.
 - c. after that trial and really learning it, sitting patiently & cheerfully through it, you find a more severe trial of your patience - gridlock on the 101 while trying to make it to an important appointment.
 - d. again you do well, find that you *are* more patient & forbearing. So a more intense storm comes –
 - e. you get a toothache on Friday evening and the dentist won't be back till Tuesday afternoon.
 - f. it surprises you how long-suffering you are, not getting angry with those around you, not accusing God of abandoning you.
 - g. so you find yourself with an illness that lasts, not days, but weeks, maybe even months.
9. Peter grasped the lesson Jesus sent them into the storm to learn *while he sat in the boat*.
 - a. that lesson was that as we obediently follow the Lord, things will not always be *smooth sailing*.
 - 1) storms will come –
 - 2) but the Lord is *no less present*, His power & love *no less real* for the presence of the storm.
 - b. it's one thing to grasp that truth while sitting in the boat, it's the same lesson at *an even deeper level* to step out of the boat and walk on water.
 - c. Peter's sinking reminds us that as long as we are in these bodies, on this earth, the lessons will not end – not till step onto the peaceful shore of heaven.
 - 1) whether it's a new lesson and new truth the Lord wants us to teach us about Himself, or the same truth at a deeper level –
 - 2) the perfecting of our faith is the *real point* of our lives!

III. CONCLUSION

A. Matthew 14:32-33

32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, “Truly You are the Son of God.”

1. And **THAT** is what He wanted them to learn - that He is the Son of God and God the Son.
2. We may not be able to see Him, but He sees us!
3. The storm we find ourselves in is only the storm He’s allowed to perfect or correct us.
4. And all the while He watches us, He also prays for us & will come to us at precisely the right moment.

B. Storms

1. As I’ve sought the Lord for direction for 2004 – I’ve felt impressed that the Lord wants us to carry on with the same theme as this year.
2. 2003 has been a year of great difficulty for many of us – 2004 will see the same.
3. But know this – Jesus is *perfecting* us! The trials we’ll endure this year are for our good!
4. We must continue to look to and for Him.
5. Who do you want to be numbered with -
 - a. the multitudes who were sent home by Jesus – with full bellies but empty hearts?
 - b. or the disciples, who at the command of Jesus sailed into a storm, and got to personally experience the One who walks on water and invites them to come walk with Him?