

Theme: When You're in the Storm, Listen to Jesus

Matthew 14:22-33 Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. **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. **24** But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. **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, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. **27** But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, **"Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."** **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. **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?"** **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."

Imagine the stress that must have been on the disciples that evening. They were obviously terrified in the storm; we're told that much. But, they also had been in the midst of it for some time. Matthew records the story using the Roman ordering of time. The Romans divided the night into 4 watches. By the time Jesus reveals Himself, it's sometime in the early morning hours and the disciples had been in the storm for several hours.

I've never been in an open water storm before, whether on a large sea or the ocean. Perhaps you have. But, I have been out on water enough to know that it doesn't take long to feel like matters are out of your control. Certainly the disciples felt that way, and with it came a lot of stress. But, at the sight and sound of Jesus, something amazing happened. With the storm still raging and the wind blowing, Peter requested to join the Lord on the water. What a strange prayer by Peter, why not ask Jesus to come to the boat or to calm the sea? Clearly, Peter wanted a taste of Jesus' power. We know how it feels. We desire it too; to witness and experience God's almighty power. In a life built around faith, there is always a desire to realize God's presence first-hand.

But raw power was not enough to alleviate Peter's stress. Sure, it worked for a moment as Peter did the impossible; becoming the only other person in history to walk on water. But, in a panicked state of doubt, Peter took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink. A few seconds of relief and back he was, under the pressure of sin once again. What Peter didn't realize that night was that he didn't need a miraculous sign from Jesus in order to be released from the pressure. Something much greater and much simpler was with him, His Savior's gracious words of life, salvation, and reassurance.

It sounds simple because it is simple. In fact, our text graphically portrays how simple the help we need is. All you need to do is exactly what God beckons you to do, follow the voice of your Savior. When you remove all the other words of our text and single out the things Christ speaks, you see it all. I put them in red in your bulletins to show you: Jesus says to you as He did to Peter:

- "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."
- "Come"
- "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

The storms of our lives seek to rob us of the security we have by faith in Jesus Christ. Satan uses them to make us afraid and to get us to doubt. Yet, all we need is the calming voice of Jesus, saying the very same things back to us. He reminds us to be cheerful, not afraid. He calls us to His side and through His Word day after day. And He lovingly reminds us, faith does not doubt.

Think of it in another way, with another analogy from the sea. There are two ways to handle deep ocean water pressure. One is to use a tiny, submarine-like vessel that deep ocean diving teams use to investigate ocean life at great depths. It repels the stress of the ocean depths by several inches of thick, steel plates. It is rigid and not easy to move around. Viewing is limited to thick, porthole glass windows. It gets the job done but it's difficult to use. The other way to repel stress at those depths is how the aquatic creatures who live there do. They don't have thick, bulky membranes. Rather, they designed to be free-flowing and light. Their bodies naturally protect against the pressing ocean by allowing the pressure to work through them. It's as if they are transparent in that sense, the pressure of the ocean becomes part of who they are.

In a similar way, we can become rigid and bulky when dealing with the stress and pressures of life. We can put up our defenses and block everything out. We'll get through life this but it doesn't make for a very fulfilling life, and it blocks out those around us. But, God gives us the ability to pass directly through the stress; to open ourselves up to others. Like deep-water sea creatures, faith in Christ shields us as if the pressures aren't even there. The calming voice of our Savior takes the burdens away.

You may think, "Yeah, right, I wish was that easy." I agree that it doesn't feel like it sometimes. But, why is that? Is it because God is ineffective for us? Is it because our Savior's Word *doesn't* calm? Or could it be that we are busy seeking something else? Storms in your life work the same way that storms on the Sea of Galilee worked. They are unexpected. You are powerless against them just as the disciples were. Sometimes they last for what seems like an eternity. We cry out as the Christians of old did, "O Lord, how long?!" Storms obscure your vision and hearing, so much so that you are tempted to think of everything going on around you, not on your loving Savior right in front of you. Sometimes, sin is so pervasive in life that we don't even recognize Jesus.

Maybe you have something on your mind right now that you're going through. Perhaps you feel lack of contentment and too much pressure from work. You might be worried about health or safety concerns for yourself or a loved one. Do you have stress because life is so busy and moves so fast that you feel like you're missing what's important? Maybe there are just too many questions and not enough answers. ***What storm are you in?*** Could be more than one too.

We could always spend time listing things that make life difficult, problems that linger, or ailments that annoy us. But, nothing you're going through, or can encounter, makes Christ's words difficult. "Be of good cheer, He is with you. Come to Him. And do not doubt, but believe." That's all; so incredibly simple and filled with the "peace that passes all understanding."

In this short text Jesus tells us everything it takes to be a Christian. So often, when people inquire into what it takes for faith, you get some long-winded, convoluted answer about all these different signs and manifestations of the Spirit which prove you have the faith that counts. Again, it shouldn't surprise us that the actual words of Jesus are much simpler. Perhaps He did these very actions and saw to it that they were recorded in Scripture to remind generations like ours.

He gives us the simple words which we've already cited; they stand for themselves. But, in those moments where our vision or hearing is disrupted, He sets an example for us to follow. Before the storm even began or Peter walked on the water. Long before the battle on the sea began, Jesus went off on His own and prayed. Let this moment not be forgotten among the others. Let us not diminish the significance of this lesson. If the Son of God can take time for conversation with His Father, we certainly can too. And if Jesus finds value to prayer; what treasures it must hold for us mere sinners and mortals.

But, as with all forms of communication, you can't be the only one talking in your prayer life. When you speak to God, remember to listen back. God can and certainly does show His will and His answers through the things that happen in life. Peter's situation was one such example; an unmistakable miracle with a clear message from the Lord. But, don't be waiting around for such things either. If God desires to speak to you in that way, you'll know it without having to wait for it. Instead, what you can do now is to listen that what God has *already* said. It may not be as flashy or trendy and showing off some sign or power, but the simple and clear Word of truth is able to get you through any problem.

Very often, the reason we struggle under our stresses so much is because we go our own way and put up our defenses like that tiny, deep-water submarine. Life is rigid and inflexible. Problems and cares of the world seem to dominate our thinking. But, it doesn't have to be this way. There's a much better way to handle stress; listen to Jesus. When you do that, you find that those seemingly distant and outdated words of Scripture contain a lot more effectiveness and power than you first thought.

It's not that the value of our prayers that lifts stress or eases problems. It's that prayers bring us closer to God who does those things. Prayers put us into contact with God's Words and God's Words tell us the truth. Sometimes that truth can be as harsh as the sea's cold waves and biting wind. Sometimes we fight and struggle against the truth as the disciples fought against the storm. When we're confronted with our sins or the times we've disobeyed God's will. Make no mistake, though, none of them doubted the truth of what they were up against. But, God's Word also brings to us the truth of His love. Jesus' statement to be of good cheer was just as real as the wind and waves. And at His command, all pressure was gone. The stress that the disciples were so helpless against, vanished in an instant.

And so the Savior beckons you to Come and trust His promise of comfort. He is able to lift your worries, stresses, and pressures away at any moment. It may be that you need to wrestle against something for a bit longer. His grace operates according to His timing, and for that we should be thankful. But, relief always comes. As Paul wrote, so we believe, **"Nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Savior. He who did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"** Earlier, we asked the question that many before us asked, "How long, O Lord?" Hear the reply of those faithful saints, from Psalm 13: **Consider me and answer, LORD my God. Restore brightness to my eyes; otherwise, I will sleep in death. 4 My enemy will say, "I have triumphed over him," and my foes will rejoice because I am shaken. 5 But I have trusted in Your faithful love; my heart will rejoice in Your deliverance (Psalm 13:3-5).** This is your hope too.

Peter's failure reminds us of his faith later on in a similar account (John 21:1-14). After Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples were fishing and finding no success. Jesus appears on the shore and commands them to cast their net on the right side of the boat. It is overflowing with fish. John recognizes the stranger as Jesus and tells Peter. Peter plunges into the sea and swims ashore. Two stories on the sea of Galilee. Two times Jesus appeared to the disciples. Two miracles. But also two examples of Peter's faith. In our story, Peter measures

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his faith by his ability to walk on water, a mighty feat indeed. But, in the end he fails because he takes his eyes off Jesus. In the second account, he seems much clumsier. He certainly doesn't do anything miraculous. He just jumps into the water. But, his faith is displayed in his unending devotion to Jesus. Willingness to follow at all costs, no matter how it looks to others. The second story is a much greater example of great faith, even though it may not seem like it on the surface. Faith is not based on how we look to the outside or whether we prove ourselves to be powerful. It is about following Jesus, and desiring His presence at all costs.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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