

*Two lessons may be learned from the experience
our Lord's disciples had on the Sea of Galilee—
concerning godly fear and faith.*

IN THE STORMS OF LIFE

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The Miracle of the Stilling of the Tempest
(Matt. 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25)

ALTHOUGH most Christians think otherwise, God has not promised His children physical comfort, material prosperity, or freedom from persecution in this day of grace. He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3) and has promised to supply all our material need (Phil. 4:19), but physical comfort is not necessarily material need. Suffering and difficulty may well be expected to characterize a normal Christian experience. This is what Paul meant when he said that, as believers, we may expect that "for Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter" (Rom. 8:36; cf. I Pet. 1:6, 7).¹ Of course we are not ungrateful for times of ease, but distresses are not necessarily an indication of God's disfavor. For if the latter were true, then one would be forced to conclude that Paul was out of the will of the Lord when he suffered want (Phil. 4:12).

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¹This is also in accord with Christ's words recorded in John 15:2, 3. If one translates *airei* "he lifts up" (as in Mark 10:21, John 8:59 and many other references) then the Lord's teaching is that unfruitful Christians are encouraged (lifted up), not removed (taken away), and fruitful Christians are purged (which may involve times of difficulty and distress).

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In these times of difficulty which come into all of our lives, we learn to know the Saviour better. This was the experience of the disciples one evening as they were crossing the Lake of Galilee with the Lord in a small boat, for as He slept a storm arose, and in the miracle which followed—the stilling of that storm—the disciples learned lessons from their Teacher and ours. This miracle, then, becomes an illustration not only of the truth that true disciples of Christ may be beset by difficulties which cause fear and anxiety, but it also displays principles which believers may use today in times of affliction. There are in the accounts three such principles for stilling the storms of life.

1. Look at the Example

In the storms of life our Lord serves as an example for us in two respects. First of all, He is an example in fatigue or in being tired. The day had been a busy one. Our Lord had been teaching and ministering all day long (cf. Mark 4:1) and, being weary from His labors, He fell asleep during the sail across Lake Galilee.² Priceless are the glimpses in the Word of the Babe in the stable, the Boy in the temple, the thirsty Man at the Samaritan well, the broken-hearted Friend at the tomb of Lazarus, and here the wearied Worker asleep in the stern of a boat. This is a wonderfully encouraging example for all who grow weary in the work in days that are full and often beset with difficulties. The miracle attests strongly to the fact that “we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb. 4:15).

In addition, the Lord Jesus is an example in faith or in believing. As the group was crossing the lake a storm arose. This is a frequent occurrence on Galilee as the wind is funneled through the ravines which surround the lake. This was an especially bad storm,³ and as the waves filled the

²This is the only direct statement in the Gospels referring to our Lord's sleeping. However, it is clearly implied in Mark 1:35 also.

³Matthew calls it a “large earthquake in the sea” (*seismos megas*, 4:37), and Mark and Luke refer to it as a whirlwind (*lailaps*, Mark 4:37, Luke 8:23). A whirlwind is not a single gust of wind but “a storm breaking forth from black thunder-clouds in furious gusts, with floods of rain, and throwing everything topsy-turvy . . . a whirlwind revolving from below upwards” (J. H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 368).

boat the disciples feared for their very lives, for they were in mortal danger. But see in the stern of that craft the example of faith asleep on a pillow and safe in the care of His heavenly Father. So it should and can be with us in the midst of the storms of life, for His promise never to leave us or forsake us is secure forever (Heb. 13:5).

2. Listen to the Encouragement

As we have an example in the Person of our Lord, so we have an encouragement in His power. Unfortunately, often it is only in the storms of life that believers ever experience the power of Christ, but when it is experienced we discover that it is power that cares. Sometimes, as in the instance of this storm, we are forced to come to the end of all human resources before we are even willing to experience the power of God. The skill of these expert seamen, their knowledge of the lake, their past experiences as sailors were of no avail, and in their anxiety the disciples were even questioning whether or not the Lord cared for them. But He did, and He does. Peter, for one, learned the lesson of this night well, for later he wrote: "He careth for you" (I Pet. 5:7 where the same word for "care" is used as in the accounts of this miracle). How blessed to know that an all-powerful Saviour cares for us with an infinitely intelligent love!

The disciples were also encouraged by seeing a demonstration of His power to calm. In reality there was a double miracle that night—the miracle of the wind ceasing and the miracle of the immediate calm, for usually when the wind dies down the water does not immediately cease to be agitated. "He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still" (Psa. 107:29). "The peace of God . . . shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7).

3. Learn from the Exhortation

When the sea had been calmed the Lord Jesus exhorted the disciples to learn two lessons from their experience—the lesson of fear, and the lesson of faith. He first rebuked them for their cowardly fear. (This is the word, *deilos*, which appears in Mark 4:40). Cowardice, for this is how the word is best translated,⁴ should have no place in the make-up

⁴J. H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, p. 138.

of a Christian, for it is something God has not given the believer (II Tim. 1:7), since it belongs to the characteristics of the old nature (Rev. 21:8). It always has a bad connotation in its uses in the New Testament. It is a base spirit which will manifest itself in the carnal Christian in the time of persecution and make him ashamed of the testimony of the Lord (II Tim. 1:8). Our Lord severely rebuked this lack of physical and moral courage on the part of the disciples that night. They had no right to cowardliness, even if it had been God's will that they perish in the sea. Neither must any twentieth century disciple be characterized by cowardice which shows up in being ashamed of the Lord or fearful of His will.

Paradoxically, however, after the rebuke the Scripture says that the disciples "feared exceedingly" (Mark 4:41). Did they not learn the lesson or heed the Lord's exhortation? Oh, they had learned a lesson; for the fear they showed after the rebuke was of a different kind (the word used in verse 41 is *phobos*). This is a proper and necessary kind of fear which should characterize all believers (I Pet. 2:17). Thayer links the meaning of this word with having been struck with terror or a sense of alarm, and says that *phobos* is the protracted state resulting from that.⁵ In other words, proper Christian fear is the resultant state of life which follows from having been struck with God. Be struck with Him and live in that state, is the idea. This is fear which stems from a genuine and continuous recognition of who it is in whose Presence we live every moment of our lives. Such fear will never drive us from our Lord but will always keep us from undue familiarity with Him. It makes us alert, active, attentive, as anyone knows who has been really terrified. God give us that kind of fear in the Church today.

The Lord's second lesson to the disciples concerned faith. Never is it recorded that our Lord rebuked a man for having too much faith, but how often He rebuked lack of faith! Each evangelist, in his record of this miracle, presents a different aspect of the faith the Lord enjoins us to have. Notice the differences in the reports. In Matthew's account, the rebuke was: "O ye of little faith." Our Lord would

⁵*Op. cit.*, p. 656.

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have our faith large because we have an omnipotent God. Mark reports that the disciples asked: "What manner of Man is this?" In other words, our faith must have as its contact an intelligent understanding of who our Lord really is. According to Luke, He said: "Where is your faith?" That is, our Lord wants our faith to be contemporaneous—a present experimental reality. Large faith, in a living Saviour, and that today, is the exhortation of this second lesson. Only such faith truly honors Him.

Here are the principles for help in the storms of life. When burdens, problems, trials, and difficult circumstances seem to overwhelm, look at the example of His blessed Person. Listen to the encouragement of His all-powerful voice, saying: "Peace, be still." Learn to live moment-by-moment in His Presence. Only these things, but surely these things, will still the storms of life.
