

WHERE IS JESUS WHEN YOU NEED HIM MOST?

SERIES: JESUS, SAVIOR OF THE LOST

By Ron Ritchie

I met a man recently at a local Bible study and then met him again, a month or so later, at a men's conference. In the course of one of our conversations I told him I would like to get to know him better, so I asked him to write down a little of his background. Here is part of what he wrote:

Most of my life has been spent chasing a lie. I was raised a Mormon and found myself chasing the American dream (Mormon style). I was almost 40 years old when everything came apart. Both of my sons were in an auto accident. One was killed and one badly injured. My wife of 20 years decided she hated men and didn't want to be married to one, especially me. My mother died of a heart attack, and then the son who was injured became a paraplegic in another accident. My job ended in a big layoff. My son blamed me for the split-up of our marriage and now hates me. I became an alcoholic, and life as I knew it ended. I had lost everything.

What an amazing story! One day everything was just fine. The sun was shining and this man was sailing along calmly on a smooth lake. Then out of nowhere the storm clouds gathered and the waves began to swell. Soon, they began crashing over his bow; his boat was swamped and began to sink. What do you do when that happens? Where do you turn when you realize there appears to be no hope of rescue?

I'm sure many of us can relate to this man and his pain. We could write a letter like this to a friend, telling of our past or present storms. Like my new friend, because we have a religious background, we are tempted to cry out in the midst of a stormy season, "Where is Jesus when you need him most? If Jesus really is all that he says he is, why are the seas around me so rough and getting rougher? Why is my boat sinking?"

In our studies in the gospel of Luke, let's turn to chapter 8, verses 22-25 today and I'll show you where Jesus was, and will be, no matter how bad or how many the storms of life that come crashing into our experience. Where is Jesus when you need him most?

I. He is with us in the midst of the storm, Luke 8:22-24a

Now it came about on one of those days, that He and His disciples got into a boat, and He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." And they launched out. But as they were sailing along He fell asleep; and a fierce gale of wind descended upon the lake, and they began to be swamped and to be in danger. And they came to Him and woke Him up, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!"

Our Lord had just finished teaching the parable of the sower to the multitude sitting by the shores of the lake of Galilee. Privately, he explained to his disciples the meaning of the symbols in the parable so that they would more clearly understand the "mysteries of the kingdom of God" (8:10), and their responsibility to be faithful lights who sowed the seed of the word of God into the hearts of men until the end of the age.

According to the other gospels, Jesus also taught eight other parables: the parable of the second sower of seed; the parable of the wheat and tares; the parable of the mustard tree; the parable of the leavened bread; the parable of the hidden treasure; the parable of the pearl of great price; the parable of the dragnet; and finally, the parable of the head of the household, before he headed out to sea in a borrowed boat.

Matthew 13:53 records, "...it came about that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed from there." And he said, "Let us go over to the other side," that day or soon after (Mark 4:35); or, according to Mark 4:36, "when evening had come." So our Lord got into one of several boats that were going to cross the sea that evening (Mark 4:36).

They launched out upon the lake, but as they were sailing along, "He fell asleep." According to the "Harmony of the Gospels," Jesus had been teaching the disciples and the crowds all day long. Naturally, he felt exhausted after such a tiring day. As he sat in the stern of the sailboat, taking in the fresh air and feeling the rocking motion of the boat upon the waves, I can see him getting comfortable, perhaps using a folded-up sail for a pillow, and drifting off into a refreshing nap.

But "a fierce gale of wind descended upon the lake, and they became swamped and in danger" (v.23). The Sea of Galilee is a body of water about 6-8 miles wide, 10-13 miles long and 700 feet below sea level. If you have ever been to Lake Tahoe, you can visualize this story. The Galilean sea was surrounded by high and low mountain ranges. At certain times of the year the eastern winds cause the storm clouds to gather quickly, causing gale-force winds between 32 and 63 miles an hour. When the gale warning flag is raised in a harbor, wise sailors keep their boats in the slips till the warning passes. But this "fierce gale of wind" that hit the Lake of Galilee on this day came on without warning.

"They began to be swamped and to be in danger," says our text. Mark 4:37 records, "The waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up with water." Unlike today, however, with our high-tech communications, in this context the owner of the boat couldn't reach for his ship-to-shore radio and call out, "oy vay! oy vay!" (which is Hebrew for "May Day! May Day!"), and suddenly out the fog, rain and raging sea would appear a Roman Legion Coast Guard boat! No! Their 18-foot open sail boat with several disciples and crew began sinking in the middle of the lake.

Let's take stock of this situation. First, we have several experienced sailors who had been raised on this lake-the brothers Peter and Andrew, and James and John, former fishermen who owned their own boats. Second, we have several boats that had been built by experienced boat builders for the good and foul weather of that lake. Third, we have a dark night. Fourth, we have a gale-force wind. Fifth, a set of high waves. Sixth, a sleeping Jesus. And seventh, a ship taking on water and sinking. What would you have done if you were in that boat on that evening in that storm?

Here is what the disciples did: "And they came to Him and woke Him up saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" "Save us Lord we are perishing!" (Matt. 13:25). "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38). Two things are going on at the same time here. First, in the midst of this gale our experienced sailors went into a state of panic. The storm was bad-the worst they had ever been in-so they turned to the Lord and woke him up from a sound sleep to inform him of their plight. "We are perishing," they cried ("and that 'we' includes 'you,' Lord"). Further, "It appears to us that you are more interested in sleeping and don't seem to care that we are perishing. But the bottom line is, you are the only one who can save us, Lord!" Despite their vast experience as fishermen and sailors they could do nothing. They had no control over the weather. All they were depending on for security was suddenly being challenged and found wanting.

That is exactly where we find ourselves on occasion. We have a personal relationship with Jesus. We walk and talk with him. When he asks us to go to the other side of some symbolic lake, we jump into our symbolic (and familiar) boat, feeling very comfortable about our knowledge of sailing. After all, Jesus is very good at what he does on the shore-teaching, healing, and raising the dead. But when it comes to sailing, that's when we take charge. We don't even invite our Lord's suggestions about sailing. We are quite happy to have him go to sleep in the stern.

Why do you think God allowed this gale-force wind to blow and endanger the lives of these righteous men who had left everything to follow Jesus, men who were on "God's side"? Well, as you can see in this story, that is so typical of how we act. After we have used all of our physical, mental and emotional resources and we find our hearts being swamped with fear, and still sinking, then we are forced to turn to the "sleeping figure" in the back of the boat.

My friend's letter continues,

My path to find the Lord has been a hard one. I was a broken man. Nobody had any use for me but Jesus Christ. He had me right where he wanted me. His love seemed hard for a long time, but I can see now that it was necessary.

I then contacted botulism toxin from improperly prepared food. It is 99.89% fatal. He brought me to death's door to strip away my pride and self-reliance. He left me completely paralyzed and on life support for three months. He let me struggle to see and hear again, then to crawl and finally walk and talk again. I was forced to rely on him for everything.

Where is Jesus when we need him most? He is with us in the midst of the storm, and,

II. He is with us in the midst of the calm, Luke 8:24(b)-25

And being aroused, He rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm. And He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were fearful and amazed, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?"

Our Lord had two responses. Mark's gospel records, "He rebuked the wind and the surging waves, 'Hush, be still'" (Mark 4:39). The Lord God is the author of the wind and he is free to use it to his glory. This is what he did in the days of his rebellious evangelist, Jonah. This man was asked to preach in the wicked city of Nineveh, but he ran away from the Lord by boarding a ship in Joppa (1:4): "Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up." While Jonah slept below deck, the sailors became afraid and cried out to their own gods. But the seas became rougher and rougher. Finally, they awakened Jonah. They found that he was running away from God and that he was the cause for the storm. So they threw him overboard, "and the raging sea grew calm." In another situation, the Lord allowed Satan, the murderer, to use the wind to destroy the children of his servant Job in order to show Satan that in the midst of that apparent tragedy Job would not curse God but would remain faithful.

In verse 24, Luke reports that the Lord Jesus "rebuked the wind and the surging waves and they stopped, and it became calm." We said earlier that the Lord God is in charge of the winds. He used them once to get a rebellious prophet named Jonah to fulfill his ministry in a pagan society. At other times the Lord God allows Satan to use the winds to bring death and destruction to the servants of the Lord, but to no avail in the end.

In this case on the Sea of Galilee, I believe Satan and his demonic powers were behind this eastern gale. I have three reasons for so believing. First, the gale was so strong it was about to destroy all the men aboard the boat. We know that Satan has been a murderer since the beginning, when he encouraged Cain to kill Abel, thereby seeking to destroy God's plan for the redemption of humanity through the godly seed of the sons of Adam. Then Satan tried to kill Jesus at different times while our Savior was on earth. He tried to use Herod to kill him as a babe in Bethlehem; he personally tried to tempt Jesus to jump off the temple; he tried to use the people of Nazareth to throw him off a hill; he tried to use the Pharisees of Jerusalem to kill him. Here we have another attack against God's plan of redemption, but this time the attack is against the Redeemer himself. Second, the Lord and his disciples were sailing to the eastern shore of the lake for a ministry that Satan certainly did not want to see take place. There, the Lord would later cast out from a man with an unclean spirit a "legion" of demons. Third, the word for "rebuke" in this case is the same Greek word our Lord used to speak to the demonic in Luke 4, the occasion when the demons wanted to announce to the Jewish community that Jesus was the Holy One of Israel. Jesus said, "Be quiet (or, be muzzled)" not to the Jewish man, but to the demons living inside of him. Here on the lake, Jesus said "Be muzzled," speaking to the invisible demonic being behind the wind.

The Lord God by his word created the universe and all that is in it. No force in heaven or on earth can stop the word of God and the will of God. So by a word the Lord Jesus stopped the evil wind.

Then he rebuked the disciples, "Where is your faith?" "Why are you timid, you men of little faith?" (Matt. 13:26) Why did the Lord rebuke them? Jesus appeared on the stage of history and was declared by his cousin, John the Baptist, to be the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Then our Lord chose some disciples in order to prepare them to carry the gospel of redemption into the next generation after he was crucified for the sins of mankind, buried, and raised again from the dead by his Father in heaven. For two years our Lord had been demonstrating his claim to being the long-awaited Messiah by healing the sick, casting out demons and raising the dead. That is why, after overcoming the deadly power of nature, he asked them, "Where is your faith?" Panic had blinded the eyes of faith.

Jesus was asking, "Do you really believe that after these two years during which you have witnessed my person, powers and plan of redemption that my Father would allow Satan stop his plan by means of a storm?" If Jesus was not the Son of God, then God's whole plan of redemption was about to sink to the bottom of the lake, and all on board were about to perish. Though they were privileged to be insiders with regard to the mysteries of the kingdom, it is evident that the disciples still needed much strengthening in conviction about the identification of the King. Some of them, like the inner circle of disciples, Peter, James and John, were learning to walk by faith. But the process was slow. "Muzzle your fears," Jesus told them, "for they are not from God."

Verse 25 gives us the response of the disciples: "And they were fearful and amazed." At first they were filled with fear of the deadly storm, and now they were filled with fear of the power of the living Lord. Psalm 89:8-9 says,

O Lord God Almighty, who is like you?
You are mighty, O Lord, and your faithfulness surrounds you.
You rule over the surging sea;
when its waves mount up, you still them.

The frightened disciples were saying to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?"

In Proverbs 30:1-4, the humble Agur asked his friends,

Who has ascended into heaven and descended?
Who has gathered the wind in His fists?
Who has wrapped the water in His garment?
Who has established all the ends of the earth?
What is His name or His son's name?
Surely you know!

Yes, we know his name, and we know the name of his Son. The name of the Father is Yahweh, God Almighty, and his Son's name is Jesus (Luke 1:31), the Son of God (Luke 1:35), "for it is He who will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

In Psalm 107, a song of deliverance in times of trouble, we find that this kind of incident on the Sea of Galilee had been experienced by sailors 1,000 years earlier. The disciples should have hidden this song in their hearts for moments like this. Jesus used some of the very words of this psalm when he addressed the wind and the waves.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures forever....
Others went out on the sea in ships;
they were merchants on the mighty waters.
They saw the works of the Lord, his wonderful deeds in the deep.

For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves.

They mounted up to the heavens
and went down to the depths;
in their peril their courage melted away.
They reeled and staggered like drunken men;
they were at their wits' end.
Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble,
and he brought them out of their distress.
He stilled the storm to a whisper;
the waves of the sea were hushed.

(Mark 4:39: "He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Hush, be still,' and the wind died down and it became perfectly calm").

They were glad when it grew calm,
and he guided them to their desired haven.
Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love
and his wonderful deeds for men.

What happened to my new friend who wrote the "stormy" letter? He finished it by saying,

Since I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior, life has not been easy, but it is a real adventure. Life today for me is a joy.

Where is Jesus when you need him most? He is with you in the midst of the storm and he is with you in the midst of the calm.

David Gooding in his book, *According to Luke*, wrote,

Within our earth itself, wind, wave, lightning, storm, flood, drought, avalanche, earthquake, fire, heat, cold, germ, virus, epidemic, all from time to time threaten and destroy life. Sooner or later one of them may destroy us. The story of the stilling of the storm is not, of course, meant to tell us that Christ will never allow any believer to perish by drowning, or by any other natural disaster. Many believers have so perished. It does demonstrate that he is Lord of the physical forces in the universe, that for him nothing happens by accident, and that no force in all creation can destroy his plan for our eternal salvation or separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38-39).

The secret to the Christian life is to continue to learn how to walk by faith that is based on the word of God and trust in the unseen spiritual realities—the unseen spiritual realities that our wonderful Lord Jesus came into this world willing to die on the cross for our sins; that he was buried; that he was raised by his Father and declared Lord of Lords and King of kings, and that he is now alive, present and fully aware of the various storms of our lives at this very moment. Some of the storms are sent to us by the Father, and some Satan has been given permission to send into our lives, but all the storms are in God's control and are designed to teach us to call on him by faith, before the storm clouds hit, within the storm itself, and after the storm has passed.

But after a few of these storms are calmed by our Lord we should be able to come to him in the midst of the next one, not like the disciples who panicked and said, "Lord, do you not care that we are perishing? Save us, Lord, for we are perishing!" but rather saying, "Dear Lord, by faith and experience I trust that you know about this present storm, and only you can calm the wind and the seas. Because of my faith in you, you promised me that I may perish physically, but I shall never perish spiritually. Therefore, your will be done on earth as it is in

heaven" (John 3: 16).

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