

## 53. The Gospel of John—6:15-21

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### *“Sent into the Storm” Pt.1*

(12/9/18)

#### **John 6:15-21 (NKJV)**

**<sup>15</sup> Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone. <sup>16</sup> Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, <sup>17</sup> got into the boat, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was already dark, and Jesus had not come to them. <sup>18</sup> Then the sea arose because a great wind was blowing. <sup>19</sup> So when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near the boat; and they were afraid. <sup>20</sup> But He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." <sup>21</sup> Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.**

It had been a long hard day of ministry.

It began with Jesus and His disciples leaving the area of Capernaum (northwestern shores of the Sea of Galilee) and taking a boat to the area of Bethsaida (about three or so miles away on the northeastern shores) to spend some time by themselves getting some much-needed rest.

Remember, as we have been saying, we are now in the final year of Jesus ministry before the cross—and He is withdrawing more and more from public ministry to prepare *Himself* for His crucifixion and His *disciples* for when they will be taking over the ministry after His departure.

However, the multitudes saw where He was headed and ran around the northern end of the Sea of Galilee and were waiting for Him and the disciples when they landed on the shores of Bethsaida—upwards of twenty-thousand people.

You would think that the Lord would have been somewhat irritated with the multitudes for not respecting their *space* and need for a little rest—you might be prone to think that, but you'd be wrong.

Jesus and His disciples ministered to the multitudes and when it started to get late and the people had not eaten all day—the disciples admonished Jesus to send them away to the surrounding villages so that they might buy themselves some food to eat.

However, Jesus dropped a bombshell on them by saying, *“We don’t need to send them away—you give them something to eat.”* (Matt.14:16)

We read in John’s gospel 6:5-6 that He turned to Philip and asked, **“Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.”**

**John 6:7-9 (NKJV)**

**<sup>7</sup> Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little." <sup>8</sup> One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, <sup>9</sup> "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?"**

It was then that Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish and with them fed the five-thousand men plus the women and children.

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and cross the Sea of Galilee while He went up onto one of the bluffs (‘mountain’) overlooking the sea.

John tells us that Jesus wanted to dismiss the multitudes quickly because they had their stomachs filled with food and wanted to make Him King!

They figured if He was King, He would do this kind of thing all the time—and free food back then, like today, is a reason for many people to vote for you.

However, Jesus won’t limit Himself to being the King of our stomachs—He will only be the King of our hearts and lives—and then only if we invite Him in to take control.

The gospels tell us that not long after Jesus commanded the disciples to get into a boat and cross the Sea of Galilee—a tremendous storm hit.

The question we need to ask ourselves is—did Jesus know the storm was coming?

I personally believe the answer to that question is—YES! Absolutely!

Which means He deliberately sent them into the storm—but why?

Jesus had His reasons—in fact, all the *storms* that we face in the Christian life are designed by God to serve a purpose.

We'll look at what those purposes are in a moment.

Right now, it's only important we understand that they found themselves in this terrible storm—because they were in the will of God and not out of the will of God.

Many Christians have the mistaken idea that obedience to God produces—“*smooth sailing*” in our Christian lives.

But Jesus promised His disciples— “*In the world you shall have tribulation.*” (John 16:33).

So, Jesus told His disciples to go across the Sea of Galilee knowing what was coming while He went up onto a mountain by Himself.

When the disciples got about half way across—suddenly gale-like winds came out of nowhere.

One author explained—

*“The Sea of Galilee lies just over 600 feet below sea level, near the northern end of the Jordan River Mt. Hermon rises 9,200 feet to the north, and strong northerly winds often blow down the upper Jordan valley with great force.*

*When they meet the warmer air over the Galilee basin, the intensity is increased. Hitting the cliffs on the eastern shore, the winds swirl and twist, causing the waters beneath them to churn violently. The fact that they come quickly and with little warning makes the storms all the more dangerous and frightening.”*

And so, when the disciples got about half way across—suddenly gale-like winds came out of nowhere.

The waves swelled, and Matthew tells us they were “*tossed*” by the waves.

The Greek says they were, “*tortured or tormented*” by the waves—remember, these were seasoned fishermen.

They had seen many storms on the Sea of Galilee and this one had them terrified—this was a storm of storms.

Now, I have to give the disciples some credit, since the wind was blowing against them, they could have stopped fighting the wind and let it push them back to where they had started—but instead, they fought the wind and kept on rowing.

You see, Jesus had given them a command to cross the Sea of Galilee and with all of their hearts they wanted to obey Him—it’s called ‘perseverance’ and that’s a good thing!

Now, while the disciples were struggling on the sea—Jesus was up on the mountain.

John tells us in verse 3 of chapter 6 that the Passover was near which meant there was a full moon out.

And Mark tells us that from where Jesus was sitting on the mountain—He could see them struggling on the Sea of Galilee in the moonlight.

You need to understand that this wasn't a *rain* storm with clouds—it was a *wind* storm which didn't block out the moonlight.

Matthew tells us that Jesus was up on that mountain praying—no doubt for them.

So here are the disciples fighting for their lives out on the Sea of Galilee while Jesus is sitting up on the mountain watching the whole thing taking place.

The whole thing was taking place under the watchful, prayerful eyes of Jesus—and He knew exactly what was going on and how much they could endure.

And just about the time they were giving up hope of coming through this storm alive—He came to them walking on the water and rescued them.

To those who don't know God this incident seems, at best, like a meaningless experience for the disciples to have been put through.

And at worst, it seems like an example of a cruel and sadistic God putting these poor disciples through this storm for His own twisted amusement—simply for the enjoyment of watching them struggle for their lives.

There are a lot of people who have that concept of God—but for those of us who are Christians, who believe that God is a God of love, we know that there are no meaningless experiences in life and that everything God allows in our lives has an ultimate purpose. (Romans 8:28)

But what this incident does force us to do, as believers, is to consider why God would send His people deliberately into storms?

A storm could be any trial, tribulation, problem, or painful circumstance that we find ourselves battling in life—as did the disciples with this storm (for them it was literal—for us metaphorical).

Too many of us Christians, if we had our way, would only choose blue skies and smooth sailing in life—we tend to be ‘fair weather’ Christians.

But, as an old Arab proverb goes, “*all sunshine makes a desert*”—it’s only through the storms of life that we grow and blossom in the Christian life.

I’d like to divide this study into two parts:

## **I. A Lesson in the Perfection of Faith**

## **II. A Look at the Purpose of Storms**

### **I. A Lesson in the Perfection of Faith**

For this morning I’d like to look at and develop the narrative of this story as recorded in Matthew 14:22-33 and then next week we’ll look at some of lessons we can glean from why God allows and even sends us into the storms of life.

Now it’s very important that you remember the details of this narrative if you’re going to fully understand the lesson the Holy Spirit wants to teach you.

Jesus sends His disciples out onto the Sea of Galilee knowing a storm was coming.

It was Passover time which meant there was a full moon and therefore enough light to see them struggling on the lake against the storm.

Again, this was a wind storm not a thunderstorm with clouds which would have made things too dark to see them.

Now while they were going through this Jesus was up on the mountain watching and praying for them—*testing*, and as we’re going to see, perfecting their faith in Him.

Jesus had tested them in a storm before, when He was *in the boat* with them (Matt. 8:23–27)—but now He tested them by being physically *out of the boat*—the Lord was stretching their faith further.

**Matthew 14:25 (NKJV)**

**<sup>25</sup> Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.**

The first watch is from six to nine in the evening, second from nine to twelve, the third watch is from twelve to three, and the fourth watch is from three to six.

Matthew tells us that Jesus came to them in the fourth watch of the night—sometime after three o’clock in the morning.

By this time, they had been struggling for at least 6 hours on that sea—maybe longer.

They were no doubt exhausted, sick and probably feeling like all was lost and they were going down—when all of a sudden here comes Jesus walking toward them on the water!

Often, we feel like the Lord has deserted us when we are going through the hard times of life—I’m sure the disciples said to themselves, “*O why didn’t Jesus go with us? Now we’re alone and going to die!*” (“I will never leave you or forsake you” Heb. 13:5)

In the Psalms, David complained that God seemed far away and unconcerned in the darkest moments of his life—yet he knew, faith, that God would ultimately rescue him.

Jesus always comes to us in the storms of life—“*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you*” (Isa. 43:2).

He usually doesn’t come at the time *we* think He should come or at a time that is convenient for us.

He comes to us when we have come to the end of ourselves—the perfect time when we need Him the most!

He waited until the ship was as far from land as possible, so that all human hope (in themselves) was gone—once again, He was testing the disciples’ faith.

God wants to build our *faith* not our *resourcefulness*. “*It’s not by power nor by might but by My Spirit says the Lord.*” (Zech.4:6)

Why did Jesus walk on the water?

Why didn’t He simply ‘materialize’ into the boat—why walk to it on the water?

The answer was—to show His disciples that the very thing they feared at that moment (the sea) was only a “bridge” for Him to come to them.

Often, we fear the difficult experiences of life (such as sickness, financial hardship, or bereavement)—only to discover that these experiences bring the Lord closer to us than we ever thought possible.



**Matthew 14:26 (NKJV)**

**<sup>26</sup> And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear.**

Why didn't they recognize Jesus?—because they weren't looking for Him.

Had they been waiting by faith, they would have known Him immediately after all—didn't He command them to '*cross over*' the sea?

If the Lord tells you to "*cross over*" you'll never go under!

Instead, they jumped to the false conclusion that they were all alone in the storm, and even when they saw Him coming on the water to them—they didn't recognize Him but thought He was a ghost.

Their fear caused them to see the situation irrationally and they panicked.

Fear and faith cannot co-exist in the same heart simultaneously because—fear always blinds the eyes to the presence of the Lord.

**Matthew 14:27 (NKJV)**

**<sup>27</sup> But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."**

In the Greek He said, "*Be of good cheer! I am; do not be afraid*".

In other words, "*Don't be afraid, cheer up—remember Me, the great I Am? I've got everything under control.*"

**Matthew 14:28-29 (NKJV)**

<sup>28</sup> And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." <sup>29</sup> So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.

Some people have gotten on Peter for this, they say he was being presumptuous—and certainly we need to be careful that we don't act presumptuously and call it faith.

But look, the Lord never encourages *presumption* in our walk with Him—and yet here He *encourages* Peter to come to Him on the water.

The Lord will always encourage a genuine step of faith.

**Matthew 14:30-31 (NKJV)**

<sup>30</sup> But when he saw that the wind *was* boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" <sup>31</sup> And immediately Jesus stretched out *His* hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

I think the Lord was gently and lovingly reproving Peter—“*Peter what went wrong? You were doing so well, why did you stop trusting and start doubting?*”

I believe the question was designed to cause Peter to examine why he failed so that he could learn and do better next time.

Our Christian life consists of a series of tests designed to stretch our faith and, if we fail the test, the Lord uses the opportunity to sit us down and say,

“*Okay, what do you think went wrong? You were doing good for a while, you were walking in faith and My power was upon you but then you fell down—why do you think that happened?*”

Why did Peter sink?—that's easy, because he took his eyes off of Jesus and put them onto his circumstance.

That folks, is the same reason we all fail as Christian after we start stepping out in faith.

For a while everything is going great but then we take our eyes off of Jesus, we look around at the enormity and impossibility of what we're doing—fear grips our hearts, and we start to sink. (Calvary Radio step of faith)

It bears repeating—fear and faith cannot co-exist in the same heart at the same time—either fear will dispel your faith or faith will dispel your fear.

And so, Jesus said to Peter, *“O you of little faith. Why did you doubt? You had a little faith, you were able to start, but you weren't able to finish”*.

However, a *little* faith is still better than *no* faith—like the other disciples.

At least Peter was willing to *attempt* the impossible and step out in faith.

And because of it, for a while at least, he experienced what it was like to walk on water—he experienced what it was like to do the impossible!

That's more than can be said for the other eleven apostles who stayed in the boat and played it safe!

One pastor put it this way:

*“All of us are “would-be water walkers.” And God did not intend for His children created in his divine image, to go through life in a desperate attempt to avoid failure.*

*The boat is safe, the boat is secure, and the boat is comfortable. The water is high, the waves are rough, the wind is strong, and the night is dark. A storm is out there, and if you get out of your boat, you may sink.*

*But if you don't get out of your boat, you will never walk because if you want to walk on the water, you have to get out of the boat. There is something, Someone, inside us that tells us our lives are about something more than sitting in the boat, something that wants to walk on the*

*water, something that calls us to leave the routine of comfortable existence and abandon ourselves in this adventure of following Christ.”*

**Matthew 14:33 (NKJV)**

**<sup>33</sup> Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."**

This whole experience strengthened their faith by elevating their awareness of Who He was—and as their understanding of His Person and awesome power was expanded the result was—their worship was deepened!

In the storm recorded in Matthew chapter 8, when He calmed the storm they said, *“Who can this be that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”*—but now they said, *“Truly You are the Son of God.”*

The Christian life, like walking on water, is humanly impossible—it can only be lived in the power of the Holy Spirit—through faith.

Peter could walk on the water because he had faith in Jesus’ word—*“Come”* (Matt.14:29)

*“Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God”* (Rom. 10:17).

But when Peter forgot the source of his miraculous ability and stopped looking unto Jesus (Heb. 12:1–2)—he began to sink.

As long as we keep looking unto Jesus, keep trusting in His word, and relying on the power of the Holy Spirit—we can do the impossible for God.

But the minute we become occupied with ourselves or our circumstances and take our eyes off of Jesus, we’ll begin to sink—then we must cry out to Jesus to lift us up again.

I've noticed that the more I focus on my problems the bigger and more insurmountable they become and the more I begin to sink—sink into fear and depression.

And again, when it comes to serving God—it is so much easier to stay in the boat.

Of course, the *boat* represents the safety and security of our homes and our churches.

But Jesus wants to build our faith by bidding us to get out of our comfort zones, trust His Word, and take a step of faith. (Evangelism Team)

Comfortable Christianity is safe—but it's not very exciting, fulfilling or fruitful—get out of the boat (your comfort zone) and see what God will do!

I'll leave you with the words of one author—

*“Are you going through the storms of life now? He sees. Believe that, rest in it, appropriate it. Rejoice that understanding help is on the way. Help was on the way for the disciples long before they saw it, and the same is true for you.*

*Are you surrounded by darkness? Do you wonder if there is a way out? Keep expecting him to come because he often comes in the ‘fourth watch’ [when we’re exhausted, our strength is gone and we’re about to give up]. Be open to the hand of God in your life. Focus the gaze of faith upon him.”*