

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver Street
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001

WHAT TO DO WHEN LIFE GETS STORMY

Luke 8:22-25

By

Steven J. Cole

October 4, 1998

© Steven J. Cole, 1998

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture
Quotations are from the New American
Standard Bible, © The Lockman Foundation

October 4, 1998
Luke Lesson 36

What to do When Life Gets Stormy Luke 8:22-25

One of the most awful experiences of my life occurred when I was in the Coast Guard. Sixty mile-per-hour gale-force winds were churning up 20-30 foot seas and we had to rescue a man and his daughter whose sailboat was dead in the water somewhere beyond Catalina Island. Our 82-foot cutter would roll until the screws came out of the water and green water came over the above-deck porthole. I would think, "We're going over this time!" Then, we would roll the other direction. Sometimes we would crash head on into a gigantic wave and the whole boat would shudder as if it was going to come apart at the seams.

I tried to calm my fears by thinking, "You never read about the Coast Guard losing any boats in storms, so maybe we won't go down." I was so seasick that when I wasn't afraid that we would die, I wished that I could. It took us nine hours from the time we left Long Beach until we had the sailboat safely in Avalon harbor.

Storms aren't fun, either at sea or in real life. Yet we learn lessons through storms that we never would learn if life were always calm. The Christian faith is not just to get us to heaven when we die. It teaches us how to live in the here and now, especially when life gets stormy. Luke 8:22-25 relates the miracle of Jesus calming the storm at sea as the first of a series of miracles that culminate in Peter's confession (9:20). These miracles have much to teach us (as they taught the disciples) about who Jesus is and what that means to us in the trials of life. This miracle shows us that ...

Since Jesus is Lord over all, we must
trust Him in the storms of life.

At the end of this brief story, the disciples remark with awe, "Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?" That is the question Luke wants us to consider: "Who then is this?" The clear answer is,

1. Jesus is Lord over all.

In the beginning, Jesus spoke and created the universe. Thus it was no big deal for Him to speak to the wind and waves of His creation and have them obey Him. Yet for the disciples, who were still growing in their awareness of who Jesus is, it was an amazing miracle. We all know that Jesus is Lord and we can repeat the phrase easily. But we often do not really know Him as Lord in the practical, daily situations we encounter. So the Lord often does for us what He did for the disciples:

A. The Lord led them into this storm.

Jesus said, “Let us go over to the other side of the lake.” Did He know what He was getting them into? Surely He did. He knows all things and so He knew they would encounter this storm. Although the disciples were veteran fishermen who knew this lake, they probably didn’t anticipate the storm. The Sea of Galilee is about 13 miles long and 7 miles wide. It sits in a depression that is almost 700 feet below sea level, surrounded by mountains that rise to about 2,000 feet above sea level on the eastern side. When winds funnel down those hills, it can create sudden, violent storms. It was one of those unexpected storms that hit that evening—unexpected to the disciples, but not to the Lord Jesus. It must have been quite a storm, because even these seasoned fishermen feared for their lives. But even though it was so terrible, the sovereign Lord led them directly into it!

When serious trials hit, I often hear people say, “The Lord didn’t *cause* this trial; He only *allowed* it.” Somehow they think that they are getting God off the hook. Sometimes they will even say, “Satan, not God, caused this tragedy.” They think that by blaming Satan or by saying that God only allowed it, they preserve His love. But they do so at the expense of His sovereignty.

But the Bible clearly affirms that God is both loving and sovereign. You will not derive any comfort in trials by denying God’s sovereignty. True, God may use Satan to bring trials, as He did in the case of Job. But God clearly states, “I am the Lord, and there is no other, the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these” (Isa. 45:6b-7). You will find comfort in trials only if you affirm

both God's absolute sovereignty and His unfailing love. Note several features of life's storms as seen in this storm:

- Storms hit suddenly and without warning.

When we lived in California, we woke up to a news station. Sometimes their morning traffic report would mention a fatal accident and I would think, "That guy left home this morning to go to work, never thinking that he had just minutes to live. His family perhaps said a perfunctory good-bye, never imagining that they would never talk to him again." Life's storms are like that: Right now everything is smooth sailing. In a matter of hours, without warning, you're in the middle of a crisis.

Such a storm not only tests and develops your character; it reveals it. Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, was talking to a young missionary who was about to start work in China. "Look at this," he said. He pounded his fist on the table. The tea cups jumped, and the tea spilled. While the startled young man was wondering what was going on, Taylor said, "When you begin your work, you will be buffeted in numerous ways. The trials will be like blows. Remember, these blows will bring out only what is in you."

So the time to develop resources to face the sudden storms that inevitably will strike is before they hit. If you don't spend time with the Lord in the calm of life, you won't know how to trust Him in the storms.

- Storms hit believers.

This storm hit those with Christ in their boat as well as those without Christ in their boat. Mark 4:36 records that other boats were with them. If this were a fairy tale, we might read that when the storm arose, the other boats were swamped, but the boat with Christ in it sailed as smooth as glass. The fact is, Christians are not magically exempted from the storms of life. Just because you're in Jesus' boat doesn't mean that it's going to be smooth sailing. Christians are not exempt from trials.

Some think, "Yes, that's true. But I'm *servicing* Christ." They think that being committed earns them special protection from storms. But observe:

- Storms hit obedient believers who are serving Christ.

In fact, this storm did not hit the disciples because they had been disobedient but, rather, because they had been obedient! Jesus said, "Let's go over to the other side" (8:22). These men, who had committed their lives to serve Christ, obeyed. And He led them straight into a storm! And in the same way, obediently serving Christ may place you smack-dab in the middle of storms you would have avoided if you had stayed on the shore.

I have often found that the most severe times of testing have come right after I have taken a new step of obedience. Just after Marla and I returned to Dallas so that I could complete my seminary training, we were mugged at gunpoint and I had to get four stitches in my hand. While my hand was still bandaged, I slipped in the mud and cut my other hand on a thermos I was carrying. We also encountered several other trials around the same time. Shortly after we moved to California to begin in the pastorate, our six-month-old daughter, Christa, had to be hospitalized with a congenital hip problem that meant being in a body cast for two months and wearing a leg brace for several years. The very day we decided to move to Flagstaff, we learned about a major problem with our house that entailed months of difficulties. Shortly after I began here I had to deal with some major problems in the church that resulted in a lot of turmoil. The point is, being obedient to the Lord does not exempt you from storms; it often leads you right into storms! Not only did the Lord lead the disciples into this storm. Note what happened next:

- B. The Lord checked out and seemed to leave them alone in the storm.

This is the only incident in the Bible that mentions Jesus sleeping, and what a time to fall asleep! It would be one thing if Jesus had said, "Men, a storm is coming. Peter, you stay on the helm! John, make sure that sail is secure! James, get that gear tied down!" If Jesus had been actively involved, giving orders, telling them, "Hang in there, guys, we're going to make it," the storm would have been difficult, but bearable. But just when they needed Jesus' calm leadership and assurance, where was He? Sacked out in the back of the boat, oblivious to their dire need!

Have you ever felt like that in the midst of a trial? You get into it and it seems as if the Lord checked out and left you all alone! You're bailing like crazy, but the waves are winning. You're about to go under, and you wonder, where is the Lord?

C. In reality, the Lord was with them in the storm.

He's always there, even though sometimes it seems as if He's not. But often He waits until we are at our wit's end so that we sense how great our need really is. But even before the disciples called on Him, Jesus was there with them in the boat, going through the storm with them. He has promised, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). As Paul triumphantly affirms, no trial can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38-39).

I love the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who obeyed the Lord and found themselves in a storm of a different sort, thrown into Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace. As he peered into the flames, Nebuchadnezzar was astounded and said to his officials, "Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered, "Certainly, O king." He replied, "Look! I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!" (Dan. 3:24-25). I believe the fourth man was the Lord Jesus. He didn't leave those faithful men alone in their trial, but went and stood with them in the flames.

Whenever you're in a storm, even though you may think at first that the Lord is not there, He *is* there! The first thing we must do in the storms of life is to affirm that Jesus is Lord, even over the storms. Then,

2. We must trust Jesus the Lord in the storms of life.

This lesson comes through with Jesus' question, "Where is your faith?" (8:25). If there is ever a time when it seems as if panic would be legitimate, it's when you're in a major storm and your boat is being swamped. And yet Jesus rebuked not only the storm, but also the disciples' lack of faith! The fact is,

A. Storms often expose how we are not trusting in the Lord.

We all can fake it in calm waters. We can impress others with how together we seem to be. And, the disciples could cope with normal storms quite well. They had been in storms on this lake many other times. They were experts at handling their boat in rough waters. At first they probably thought, "No problem, we can handle it." But this storm brought them to the end of themselves and showed them how they were trusting in themselves. Often, a crisis shows us a side of ourselves we were blind to. The Lord uses it to reveal new areas where we need to learn to trust Him. We all must come to know our weakness so that we will rely on the Lord's strength. Storms often show us things that we don't see in calmer times:

- Storms reveal our distorted view of the problem.

The disciples excitedly cried, "Master, Master, we are *perishing!*" They thought they all were going to drown. But wait a minute! Who was on board with them? God's promised Messiah! To think that God's long-awaited Messianic kingdom could sink to the bottom of the Sea of Galilee was absurd! But in their panic, the disciples had a distorted view of the problem.

- Not all fear is wrong, but Jesus rebuked the disciples because their fear was excessive. Some fear is useful because it leads us to take prudent caution for our safety. Sometimes fear makes us spring into immediate action to save our own lives or the life of a loved one who is in danger. But fear is excessive and wrong when it causes us to panic so that we are not thinking carefully in light of God's promises. If we're so focused on the problem that we cannot see God's control over it, then we're not trusting Him.

Storms reveal our distorted view of ourselves.

"Master, Master, *we* are perishing!" That "*we*" probably included Jesus, but I'm not sure that He was their uppermost concern. They weren't saying, "Hey, guys, if we don't get out of this storm, the *Messiah* will die!" First and foremost they were fearing for their own lives.

Storms have a way of exposing our self-focus. We can put on a front of caring about others until we realize that it's going to cost us. Suddenly, it's every man for himself! Self-pity is another sure

sign that we have a distorted view of ourselves. Any time we're feeling sorry for ourselves, we're too focused on ourselves. We need to stop and get the big picture of what God is doing.

- Storms reveal our distorted view of the Lord Jesus.

The disciples ask in awe, "Who then is this?" (8:25). That was their problem—they really didn't realize who Jesus is. If they had known, they would not have been so amazed at what happened. They underestimated His power.

We do the same thing when we panic in a crisis. We try to solve our problem by figuring everything into the equation—except the supernatural power of Christ. Our distorted view of the problem and of ourselves clouds our vision so that we fail to see the marvelous person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although Luke does not mention it, Mark's account tells us that the disciples (I would guess, Peter) also said, "Lord, don't You care that we're perishing?" In a time of severe trial, it's easy to doubt the Lord's loving care for us. That's why, by faith, we must always affirm two things in our trials: God's sovereignty and His love (1 Pet. 5:6-7).

Thus we often think that we're trusting in the Lord until a storm hits. It reveals to us how we're not really trusting Him.

- B. Storms should drive us to trust in the Lord of the storm.

The disciples may have protested, "We *were* trusting in the Lord! We called to Him for help!" But they were not really calling to Jesus in faith or He wouldn't have rebuked them by asking, "Where is your faith?" What they needed most in this dire situation was to trust in the living God.

That's also what we need most in our trials. Sad to say, trusting God has fallen on hard times. Many "Christian" psychologists scoff at pastors who tell people that they need to trust God, as if that is worthless advice. But trusting God in a crisis is *not* useless advice! It is what has sustained the saints in many horrible trials down through the centuries. If you don't know how to trust God in the storms of life, you need to learn because we are commanded to walk by faith and to be built up in faith (Col. 2:6-7).

- The better we know the Lord, the better we can trust Him.

“Who then is this?” is the crucial question. Clearly, this Jesus is fully human. He had a body that got so exhausted that He could sleep in the midst of this storm. The full humanity of Jesus Christ should be of tremendous comfort to us when we are suffering from the limitations of our bodies. “We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

But not only is our Lord fully human, He is also fully divine. He merely had to speak the word and the howling winds ceased and the surging waves were instantly as smooth as glass. Just as Jesus’ full humanity encourages us because He understands, so His full deity should encourage us because He is powerful to act on our behalf. Nothing is too difficult for the living God. Not a breath of wind or a drop of water can defy His sovereign will. The better we know Him, the better we can trust Him in our trials.

- The bigger the storm, the more the Lord will be glorified when we trust Him.

We need always to keep in mind that the chief end of man is not to use God for our own happiness, but to glorify God no matter what happens to us. This storm revealed the glory of Christ in a way that would have been hidden had it not happened. The disciples got a glimpse of His majestic power, that “He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him.” The bigger the problem, the more our almighty Lord will be glorified when we trust Him.

Corrie Ten Boom, author of *The Hiding Place* and survivor of the German concentration camps, said that people often came up to her and said, “Corrie, my, what a great faith you have.” She would smile and respond, “No, it’s what a great God I have.” Our faith in trials should point people toward our great God.

- The more we trust Him in this storm, the more we will know Him and be able to trust Him in the next storm.

The winds and the water obey Jesus without question, but we always have a choice. Sadly, we often fail to obey and trust Him. But notice that first the disciples feared the storm; then, they feared the Lord. Their fear of the storm was due to their lack of faith.

Their fear of the Lord stemmed from their new awareness of His awesome power.

Faith in the Lord is not an automatic thing. It is something that we must choose to exercise, often in the face of overwhelming circumstances that seem to scream at us, "God doesn't care about you. He doesn't even exist or you wouldn't be in this trial." Faith sometimes must go back to previous situations where God has shown Himself faithful and say, "I rest there." Often we have to go back to the history recorded in Scripture, where we read of God's faithfulness to His people in horribly difficult situations. If you actively trust the Lord Jesus in your current trial, your faith will be strengthened to trust Him in the next storm.

Conclusion

I've heard Bible teachers say, "With Christ in the boat, you can smile at the storm." Certainly there is a sense in which that's true. But I don't want to give you an overly rosy picture. We need to face squarely the fact that sometimes Jesus doesn't calm the storm. Sometimes the boat does sink, even if we're trusting in Jesus. John the Baptist wasn't delivered from prison; he lost his head. Peter was miraculously delivered from prison, but James was put to death (Acts 12:1-17). So what should we do if we trust in the Lord, but the boat sinks? The miracle doesn't come.

The answer is, "We trust in the Lord Jesus as we go under. We go down singing the doxology." John Hus was burned at the stake for his faith, but he went out singing. Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer were burned at the stake together. As the fires were lit, Latimer cried out, "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as I trust shall never be put out!" Hudson Taylor lost his beloved wife Maria as they both sought to take the gospel to inland China. But he stood at her grave and sang, "Jesus, I am resting, resting, in the joy of what Thou art; I am finding out the greatness of Thy loving heart."

Do you know Jesus in that way? If not, don't wait until the storm hits. Seek Him now! Trust Him as your Savior, your only hope for heaven. Trust Him daily in the small problems you face. Then, whether He instantly calms the storm or whether your boat

sinks, you will know peace that the world can't know, the peace that comes from trusting in Jesus, the Lord over all of life's storms.

Discussion Questions

1. Since the world is watching when storms hit us, to what extent can we show our grief? Should we fake that we are calm?
2. A child is molested and murdered; a critic asks, "How can God be both sovereign and loving?" Your answer?
3. What has helped you fight feelings of self-pity in a time of trial?
4. Why is "Trust in the Lord" not worthless advice?

Copyright, Steven J. Cole, 1998, All Rights Reserved.