

# The Storm on Galilee

by William Fitch

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*William Fitch's sermon explores the lessons of faith, prayer, and the lordship of Christ through the story of the storm on the Sea of Galilee.*

**Duration:** 27:30

**Scripture:** Mark 4:35

**Topics:** "Trials"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the story of Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee. The disciples, who were experienced fishermen, found themselves in a terrifying storm that seemed to threaten their lives. Meanwhile, Jesus was peacefully sleeping in the boat. When the disciples woke him in desperation, Jesus simply spoke the words 'Peace, be still,' and the storm immediately ceased. This miraculous event left the disciples in awe of Jesus' power and authority over nature.

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## Transcript

This tip is going to discuss the story, it's told three times in the New Testament, of the stirring of the storm on the Sea of Galilee. Matthew, Mark, Luke all tell the story. And here is Luke's account of the incident.

It's in Luke chapter 8 and verse 22. It came to pass on a certain day that he went into a ship with his disciples, and he said to them, Let's go over to the other side of the lake. And they launched forth.

But as they sailed, he fell asleep. And there came down a storm of wind on the lake, and they were filled with water and were in jeopardy. And they came to him and awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish.

Then he arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm. And he said unto them, Where is your faith? And they, being afraid, wondered, saying one to another, What manner of man is this? For he commandeth even the winds and the water, and they obey him.

The Sea of Galilee on which this happened was well known, and is well known still, for its storms. One moment the water can be calm as a millpond. In an hour a storm can be raging that's terrifying and fearsome.

Sometimes, even out of a clear sky, swirling currents create terrible squalls. There are many ravines to the northeast of the upper part of the lake, through which the winds from the heights of Hauron, the plateau of

Trachonitis, the summit of Mount Hermon, rush down with such tremendous force that the little lake of Gennesaret becomes a boiling cauldron. There's no guarantee that when leaving the one side in a dead camp, you will cross the lake without encountering a tremendous storm.

Now that's exactly what happened on this occasion. Our Lord had been busy all day, and now evening has come, and he says to his disciples, Let's cross over to the other side. They promptly obeyed.

The multitudes were sent away, some who didn't want to depart, but wished to keep near Jesus wherever he was, followed in their own little boats. And then the disciples took Jesus, the verb is very strong, paralambano, meaning to take to oneself and refuse to be separated. They took their Lord like that and launched forth.

There's even a suggestion that they had almost to take him by force to get him away from the throng. Eventually, however, they were ready, and they pushed off from the shore. Jesus took his place in the hinder part of the boat, the place in which any honored guest would normally be placed, and so the journey began.

But scarcely were they on their way when the storm broke. Jesus, however, was completely unconcerned. He must have been very weary.

It had been a long day. Crowds had been around him continually. He had taught them and healed them, and this is exhausting and taxing work.

Virtue goes out of any true servant of God when he ministers God's power and brings God's message to men. Naturally, therefore, he fell asleep, and so soundly that the storm didn't waken him. What a picture for a great artist, the boat, the toiling seaman, the lashing storm, and the sleeping figure of Jesus.

That's the background to this tale of miracle. What are the lessons? Well, before getting to the immediate and major lessons of this miracle, we should first of all remind ourselves how skilled these men were when it came to boats. They had lived their life on the Sea of Galilee.

They knew its moods and its temper. They weren't likely to be surprised at anything, but it would seem that this was a storm that outstormed anything they had seen before. The mighty waves broke over the prow and the gunwales of the boat.

Bale as they might, the waters gained upon them, and they began to look at one point in their journey that they were facing certain death. And meantime Jesus was sleeping. Could it really be true? In the midst of this howling and lashing gale can the Lord of all life lie asleep like a little child? He was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow.

This is his repose amid the seeming cataclysms of life. He rests. He is fully relaxed.

What marvelous gifts must come to a sinless life! But the ragonized cry of desperation ultimately woke him. Master, carest thou not that we perish? Then he arose. What majesty there must have been in that uprising, for the mighty waters knew their master.

They also knew his voice as it thrilled out across the howling of the winds. Peace, be still. That was all he said.

Nothing more was needed. The winds ceased, and there was a great calm. The wild waves hushed.

The mighty deep sank like a little child to sleep. The sullen billows ceased to leap at thy will. The storm fell as suddenly as it had burst.

The peace that remained was shattering in its stillness. Fear for themselves turned to amazement regarding this man, and their next words were to each other. What manner of man is this that even the wind and the sea obey him? The unpredictable and tempestuous sea that they knew so well was subject to his voice.

Here is Christ in the boat. Let's look at him there. They took him with them, even as he was.

I suppose this means that they had no extra blankets or clothing with which to make a rough bed for him on board. They knew that he had asked them to cross to the other side, and they obeyed. This measure of faith they have.

They have learned to do what he asks them to do. And so they climb into the boat, get the gear and the tackle ready, and launch from shore. For them, I am sure, the greatest joy and assurance was that Jesus was with them.

But the little reckoned on a storm of this magnitude. It happened, however, even with Jesus in the boat by their side. And here, possibly, lies at least one of the lessons of this miracle.

Knowledge of Christ is no guarantee that you are going to escape from trouble. Christ was with them, and yet storm came. And this can happen to us all.

Behind what happened here is the fact that God sees to it that we are given opportunities to try our consecration, whether it be true or not. No man can be holy to the Lord unless he is wholly consecrated to the Lord. And no man can know whether he is really consecrated to the Lord except by tribulation, testing, and trial.

This is the acid test, and it's a hard one. But he who would escape this test is giving evidence that he does not wholly know the strategy of God in working out his salvation in fullness and glory. Our Lord himself was tested.

He was tested in the wilderness by the devil. He was made perfect, we are told, through suffering. And it will be the same for all the servants of Jesus who intend to demonstrate the reality of their commitment and the certainty of their consecration.

When James writes of this, he uses some superlative words. He says, Count it all joy, my brethren, when you fall into manifold trials, knowing that the trial of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

James 1 verses 2 to 4 in the revised version. Notice the use of the words manifold trials, or as the authorized King James version has it, manifold temptations. Out of the surroundings which you have been conducive to peace, comfort, and outward prosperity, we find ourselves in the midst of a wild tempest.

We move suddenly from quiet to disquiet, from trust to terror, from safety to destruction. Manifold trials are the unavoidable lot of every believer. This is something that many a Christian learns slowly, all too slowly.

Indeed, some pass through life and refuse to learn the lesson at all, grumbling against God when he brings his thunders against them. They haven't learned that it's possible to have Christ in the boat with

you, and yet run into the teeth of a gale. In such an hour, it's very easy to be terrified.

We become terrified by circumstances where we find ourselves. We go out as missionaries of the cross and find ourselves in a hostile land with little or no response. Our home, which ought to be a place of quiet rest, sometimes becomes instead a place where we vent our feelings of frustration on each other.

We haven't learned the art of moving through the rough and the difficult with confidence in our hearts, and yet this is what Christ wants us to do. This certainly is the meaning of his question to the disciples at the end of this story. How is it? How is it that you have no faith? In Matthew, Christ says, Why are ye fearful? Mark carries it a little further, saying, Why are you so fearful? Our Lord was really surprised at their fear.

He couldn't understand their terror. And if, as we pass through difficulties and we give way to self-pity or to fear of evil men or evil spirits, Christ will certainly be surprised. He will come to our aid.

You can be sure of that, even though he is disappointed with our little faith. David the Psalmist in Psalm 46 says, God is our refuge and our strength in straits of present aid. Therefore, although the earth be moved, we will not be afraid.

That's the confidence of David as expressed in that great psalm. And there's a climax further on in the psalm where it says, God in the midst of her doth dwell, nothing shall her remove. The Lord to her a helper will, and that right early prove.

The main thing is to have Christ in the boat. Even though trials come and even though we may be greatly terrified because of them, if Christ is with us, if Jesus is there by our side, no harm will befall. For he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

So we can boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I shall not fear. Hebrews 13 verses 5 and 6. Now we see here also in this story the power of fervent prayer. The power of fervent prayer.

He was in the hinder part of the ship asleep on a pillow, and they awake him and say to him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? Now this is a very audacious question. Indeed, as Matthew Henry says, it seemeth almost harsh to address the master thus. Yet they awoke him and pled with him, their eyes, their terror-stricken faces, evidence of their anguish.

Carest thou not that we perish? It was a hard thing to say. After all that they have come to know about their Lord since first they began to follow him, is it not unthinkable that they could imagine him allowing them to die? Of course it is. But there are times when the cares and burdens of life are so great, we scarcely know what to say or do.

I think the disciples are in this kind of condition at this point. They went to him nonetheless, and this is the all-important fact. They cried to him.

They knew that left to their own devices there was nothing more that they could do, and so they cried, beseeching him to have mercy, to show his pity, and to exercise his power. This might be called wits and prayer. It's not the best kind of prayer, but it's still prayer.

It certainly was fervent prayer. They awoke him. They realized that he was their only hope.

Unless he did something unique, the situation was hopeless. Wits and prayer? Yes, okay, but better than no prayer at all. You and I have to learn to pray.

Our Lord has taught us that men ought always to pray and not to faint. Luke 18, verse 1. Our Lord prayed, and that in itself is significant. He had every form of strength which men associate with masculine life.

Strength of body, strength of mind, marvelous strength of affection, amazing powers of patience, calm, undaunted when assailed by foes. And yet, this man prayed. He prayed in the hour of temptation.

When the horizon darkened with omens of rejection, he prayed. He entered the garden of Gethsemane, and there he prayed. He prayed before he chose his disciples.

The night previous, he did not sleep, but spent it in communion with God his Father. Our Lord prayed when he was surrounded by the possibility and the perils of success. When men wanted to come and make him a king, we are told he departed into a solitary place and there prayed.

Can we live the life of Christ without emulating his example? I am certain that this is an utter impossibility. Not to pray is to shut out heaven. To cease to pray is to close the ventilators of your soul and shut out air and light.

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed, the motion of a hidden fire that trembles in the breast. Prayer is the path that leads to God. Prayer is a token of our commitment to the work and will of God the Father, whose we are and whom we serve.

We must pray, moment by moment, in every place, for all mankind and to the glory of God. What God wills to accomplish on earth needs prayer as its indispensable condition. Three powers are ours to use in prayer, amid the darkness and testing of any hard or bitter situation, and they are mighty.

The blood of Jesus, that's one. Two, the name of Jesus, and three, the word of God. As you pray, take these three great and wonderful facts and plead them before the throne of God in heavenly alliance with the Holy Spirit.

We can take these unique powers and by them dispel the powers of darkness, but the measure of our surrender to Christ is the measure of our power in prayer. Prayer, may I say, is the greatest antidote to fear. In that boat, all through that storm-filled night, there was fear.

It was only when they went to Jesus and made known to Him their eager, anxious cry that fear was dispelled, because He arose and rebuked the waves, and there was a great peace. And in this tense, neurotic world in which we live our fevered lives, there is one place where we may be delivered from the burden of anxiety, care, or fear. It is the blood-stained mercy seat.

It is the throne of God. Let our prayer continually be, Lord, teach me to pray. And then as I read this story, I see the lordship of Christ.

The earliest creed that the Christian church confessed was a very simple one, two words, *Christos Kurios*, which means Christ is Lord. And it's this confession that we should learn with deeper understanding from this miracle of the stilling of the storm and Galilee. For Christ is the cosmic Christ.

This one who is sleeping in the hinder part of the boat is the one by whom everything was made. It's hard to believe, I know, but it's the heart of the gospel. The good news that erupted into the world on the first Christmas was that the one by whom all things were made had come to dwell among men.

He laid the glory of heaven behind him, and he entered our planet, not in the way in which we normally do, but through the sovereign intervention of the Holy Spirit in the life of a pure virgin. Thus he came. He is the one by whom all things were made.

He's the creator Christ. He is, according to the tremendous songs that sing their way through the book of Revelation, the kingly Christ. He goes forth conquering, and to conquer, his is the triumph, and his the crown.

And you know, it's this triumph that we see at this point of his ministry. Roused suddenly from sleep, he isn't flustered or upset. All we read is, he arose and rebuked the wind.

Let not the wind any longer roar. Let not the sea any longer rage. Both wind and sea rebuked almost as though they were separate persons.

And this same triumph he brings to us in the glory of his lordship. When our hearts are like the troubled sea and cannot rest, when our passions are up, very unruly, let us give ear to this word of Christ with which he rebukes the wind and the sea, be silent. Be silent, be dumb, be still, and know that I am God.

This is the triumph of Christ that we may know in every hour of trouble. He has promised it. He will never disappoint.

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and the rivers will not overflow thee. Let's claim this promise. Let's learn to think not confusedly nor unadvisedly, for he who has said these things to us is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Sometimes we experience what the Apostle Paul experienced. Without were fighting, he says, and within were fears. 2 Corinthians 7.5. When that happens, let us put Christ to the test and request of him to demonstrate his lordship when he speaks.

There will be great peace, peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin. The blood of Jesus whispers peace within. Peace, perfect peace, by thronging Judas' breast.

To do the will of Jesus, this is rest. Peace, perfect peace, with sorrows surging round. On Jesus' bosom not but calm is found.

Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown. Jesus we know, and he is on the throne. It is enough.

Our sorrows soon shall cease, and Jesus call us to heaven's perfect peace. This is the lordship of Christ, and we should always put him to the test. In this great story of the sealing of the storm, I see the disciples in the school of obedience.

Does it seem strange that these disciples should be taken into a great storm and a lake in order to enter a school of obedience? It may. Yet I feel sure that part of the great reason why Jesus took them there and permitted that howling gale to sweep down upon them was that they might know that they were in the place where he wanted them to be. After all, it was he who had said, let us cross over to the other side.

And when they thought of that, they realized that they had gone right into the teeth of the tempest at the command of their master. It's very remarkable that whenever the example of Christ is presented to us in the scriptures as a guide for ourselves, it's always his sufferings that are lifted up in illustration. How shall I follow Christ? Look.

Behold the man of Calvary. It's there we see best, best of all, how we may follow. Let me illustrate this with some scripture.

Let this mine be in use, says Paul, which was also in Christ Jesus. All the features which he here sets before us are those of renunciation, suffering carved on every step that Jesus took until he reached the lowest and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, Philippians 2, 5-8. To suffer patiently for is, Peter says, acceptable with God.

For even hereunto were you called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving an example that we should follow in his steps, 1 Peter 2, 20 and 21. For as much then, says the same writer, as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind. And beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's own sufferings, 1 Peter 1, 4, verses 1, 12 and 13.

All of this is freely open before us in order that we might fully understand that the school of obedience inevitably is a school of suffering. And the disciples learned that, that night on the lake, when the storm came up, and their master slept. In many another storm we too may learn the hard and testing lessons that our Lord would teach us, but in it all, I tell you, he will be precious, glorious, and divine.

To sum up, let me do so. In some very beautiful words of poetry, sometimes when all life's lessons have been learned, and sun and stars forevermore have set, the things which our weak judgments here have spurned, the things over which we grieved with ashes wet, will flash before us out of life's dark night, as stars shine most in deeper tints of blue. And we shall see that all God's plans are right, and how what seemed reproof was love most true.

And you shall shortly know that length and breath is not the sweetest gift God sends his friend, and that sometimes the sable pall of death conceals the fairest boon his love can send. If we could push ajar the gates of life, and stand within unto all God's working sea, we could interpret all this doubt and strife, and for each mystery could find a key. And if through patient toil we reach the land where tired feet with sandals loosed may rest, where we shall clearly see and understand, I know that we shall say, God knew the best.

The one who spoke the word of power was true God and true man. The disciples marveled. What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the waves obey him? But this too they've learned in the school of obedience.

Jesus Christ is Lord, and to know him as Lord is to know the joy and the wonder of life eternal, life everlasting, life abundant, life which is heaven, life, the very life of God himself.

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