

Luke 8:22-25

Calming the Storm

Science has always fascinated me. It just seems miraculous. Take the earth for example. Our earth is about 25,000 miles in circumference and 8,000 miles in diameter. It weighs six sextillion tons. That is a 6 followed by twenty-one zeros (6,000,000,000,000,000,000,000)! It spins on its axis at 1,400 miles per hour and travels through space around the sun at about 67,000 miles per hour. That's over 1,000 miles each minute. And we humans can get carsick!

At the other end of the scale, a teaspoon of water contains almost 500,000,000,000,000,000,000 atoms. Think of it this way -- there are more atoms in a teaspoon of water, than there are teaspoons of water in the Atlantic Ocean!

And think of us. Nerve impulses to our brain can travel at 170 miles per hour. Our brains can actually hold five times as much information as the recent edition of the online *Encyclopedia Britannica* (and I can't find my car keys)! Your body has 60,000 miles of blood vessels. The surface area of your lung is equal to a tennis court. The acid in your stomach can dissolve a razor blade. There are about 32 million bacteria living on every square inch of your body.

And all of this was created by God. And all of this is controlled by God. The emphasis of Luke's gospel is that Jesus Christ was that God-man. He came from heaven to earth to save humankind from its sins. He was the Messiah. He was fully human and fully God. The same power that redeems fallen man from a lost world is the same power that can restore that fallen world.

The Setting

Luke is, as usual, not specific in the chronology of his narrative. "Now on one of those days" (v. 22) is how he begins this section. Luke is interested in demonstrating how Jesus revealed Himself as the Savior of all mankind, and he only brings out the specific sequence of events when they are relevant to that purpose (such as the pregnancies of Elizabeth and Mary).

As we enter onto the scene, Jesus had been busy. He had been teaching to the crowds (v. 4-8), then instructing His disciples privately (v. 9-15), then teaching again in a home setting (v. 16-21). Perhaps He had taken time to eat. No doubt the crowds continued to follow, so that Jesus resorted to the strategy of removing Himself for a time. We cannot conclude, however, that Jesus was being selfish in this. He never did anything that was not the will of His Heavenly Father, and His movements were orchestrated by the Holy Spirit for divine effect. We will see that there was a person He needed to meet in the other side of the Sea of Galilee [see v. 25-29], so "Jesus and His disciples got into a boat, and He said to them, 'let us go over to the other side of the lake.'" (v. 22).

Perhaps this was a boat of Peter and Andrew's. Though they had left their fishing business, there is no reason to assume they had abandoned all their property. In fact, John 21:3 indicates that Peter still went out and used his boat for fishing from time to time. The complementary account in Mark suggests that there were other boats as well accompanying Jesus on His travels, "leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in the boat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him" (Mark 4:36).

Jesus and His companions traveled from near Capernaum on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee to the area of Gerasa, located on the eastern shore. As we mentioned, Jesus had a divine appointment there (v. 25-39). The Sea of Galilee is about thirteen miles long and seven miles wide. It is the lowest freshwater lake in our planet at 680 feet below sea level. It is located thirty miles east of the Mediterranean Sea, and is part of the Jordan valley, which itself is part of the Great Rift valley that stretches from Syria to Mozambique in southeastern Africa.

The lake is surrounded by steep hills which are the significant topographical factor in producing the storms for which the lake is noted. Winds off the Mediterranean rise up over the plateau known today as the Golan Heights. As the air descends into the Jordan valley, winds increase and storms can be violent. As recently as 1992, winds produced ten foot waves on the Sea of Galilee and did considerable damage to cities along the shore.

Matthew's account of the story has Jesus leaving after dark. This might at first seem strange, but remember that Peter, Andrew and the others were fishermen who often went out at night. They were comfortable sailing in the darkness.

Jesus, then did something very normal, "as they were sailing along He fell asleep" (v. 23). He was tired, it was nightfall, so He took the opportunity of the trip across the Sea of Galilee to get some rest. There is no reason to think He was much of a sailor, or of any particular use on the boat, so He got out of the way and took a nap. One gets the impression that He fell asleep almost as soon as they had set out, no doubt an indication of the fatigue under which He suffered.

We can appreciate again that Jesus was one hundred percent human. He became hungry (Matthew 4:2). He became thirsty (John 4:7). And in this case, Scripture records that He was tired. Our Savior understood what it was to be weary. This ought to be a great encouragement to all of us. Hebrews 4:15, "for 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." To be tired of working *for* God is sin, but to be tired *because of* working for God is something He can understand and with which He can empathize.

Who was with Jesus? Luke says "His disciples" (v. 22), but we must remember that at this time that could refer to any number of followers who considered Jesus as their teacher. John 6:66 refers to 'disciples' who fell away due to some harsh teachings by Jesus. The parable Jesus had just related described soil that was rocky or thorny as well as good. Since there were other boats along, it is reasonable to conclude that not only "the disciples" were there, but others as well, who were about to experience this miracle.

The Storm

Did Jesus know there was going to be a storm? Was this a premeditated miracle to strengthen the faith of His disciples? Or, in His humanity, was Jesus unaware of the impending deluge? We are not told, and it does not matter. If Jesus did know, that does not depreciate the value of His miraculous calming of the storm, and if He did not know, His own quiet faith is all the more revealed and appreciated.

While Jesus slept, “a fierce gale of wind descended on the lake” (v. 23). The word used is *laillops* and means whirlwind. This is the same word that is used to describe the storm that overtook Jonah when he tried to escape from God’s plan (Jonah 1:4) and, even more dramatically, it is the word used to describe the voice of God when He rebuked Job (Job 38:1). The gospel of Mark adds the word ‘great’ to emphasize the dramatic nature of the winds, while Matthew’s account describes a “great shaking” using the word, *seismos*, from which we get seismology, the study of earthquakes. This was a great storm.

We have talked about the size of the boats used for fishing on the Sea of Galilee before. They held more than a dozen men and their equipment. Such a storm surpasses the natural. Therefore, some argue that Satan caused the storm. They remind us that in Job 1:12, 19, it was Satan who used a storm to wreak havoc of Job and his family. They also suggest that the presence of demonic activity on the other side of the lake, the very region to which Jesus and His disciples were heading, is attested in Scripture (v. 25-39). Finally, they point out that Jesus ‘rebuked’ (v. 24) the wind, and this implies that Jesus was addressing not simply an inanimate force, but a spiritual one.

In response, we may suggest that it is God, not Satan, who controls natural forces. The laws of nature are His laws, after all. God uses the natural universe to bring about His purposes. Also, there is no biblical evidence that the demonic activity in the area to which Jesus was going had anything to do with the storm, and it seems unlikely that Luke (or Matthew and Mark) would omit such a fact if it were true. Finally, that Jesus used the word ‘rebuke’ is more likely an example of figurative language used by Luke. Think of Psalm 98:8,

“Let the rivers clap their hands,
Let the mountains sing together for joy”

Or Isaiah 55:12,

“For you will go out with joy
And be led forth with peace;
The mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you,
And all the trees of the field will clap their hands.”

The Response of the Disciples

The disciples were worried, “they began to be swamped and to be in danger” (v. 23). Some of these men were veteran fishermen. They had worked the lake before and had, no doubt, encountered its storms. They also knew what their boat could handle. For them to consider themselves in danger was not just an emotional response. They knew the sea, they knew its storms, and they knew their boat was sinking.

For them to come to this conclusion, it must have been some storm indeed. It caused the disciples to forget the care Jesus had always shown them. They forgot Who they were with. It is unfortunate that our faith disappears so quickly in the sight of some things. We are very poor theologians when we respond to our senses, rather than what we know to be true. We ought to be cautious about that. Additionally, let us remember that even people of great faith can fail. Strong people of faith can be weak in times of distress. Let us not be too quick to judge.

So “they came to Jesus and woke Him up, saying, ‘Master, Master, we are perishing!’” (v. 24). Matthew’s account has them saying “Save us, Lord; we are perishing” (Matthew 8:25). Mark’s account

reads “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing” (Mark 4:38). This is no matter of biblical discrepancy, but rather the many excited voices all pleading at once.

One must wonder if someone remembered Psalm 107:23-31,

“²³Those who go down to the sea in ships,
Who do business on great waters;
²⁴They have seen the works of the LORD,
And His wonders in the deep.
²⁵For He spoke and raised up a stormy wind,
Which lifted up the waves of the sea.
²⁶They rose up to the heavens, they went down to the depths;
Their soul melted away in their misery.
²⁷They reeled and staggered like a drunken man,
And were at their wits’ end.
²⁸Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
And He brought them out of their distresses.
²⁹He caused the storm to be still,
So that the waves of the sea were hushed.
³⁰Then they were glad because they were quiet,
So He guided them to their desired haven.
³¹Let them give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness,
And for His wonders to the sons of men!”

The Response of Jesus

Jesus responded. “He got up and rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm” (v. 24). Mark relates that the precise words of Jesus were “hush, be still” (Mark 4:39). Being one hundred percent human, Jesus had slept. Being one hundred percent God, He stilled the storm. Again, that He rebuked the waves does not imply a demonic presence, it is simply Luke way of illustrating the effective and authoritative tone and intent of Jesus.

As with other miracles of Jesus, the effects were immediate. “It became calm” (v. 24). Not only the wind stopped but the waves. This is an extraordinary physical phenomenon. That the wind stopped immediately is easy enough to understand. Wind has to stop blowing some time. But that the motion of the waves, already moved along by violent winds, would immediately cease, is beyond the bound of the laws of nature.

What a joy to know that this power is used of the benefit of His people. What a comfort to know that the God Who stilled the waves loves us. The trials we face are many and severe. Yet “greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

The problem solved, Jesus then turned to those with Him in the boat. “He said to them, ‘Where is your faith?’” (v. 25). Why had the disciples reacted this way? To be sure, the storm was great, but why didn’t they simply trust their Savior? After all, the disciples had seen miracles time and again. They had seen Him heal, drive out demons, even raise the dead. Perhaps the answer is that this was the first miracle that

directly affected them. In this instance it was their lives at stake. They were not onlookers, they were recipients of the miraculous work.

The Lesson

Though Jesus was calm throughout, the disciples continued to be frightened. First, they had been afraid of the storm. Now they were afraid of the Savior. “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?’” (v. 25). Having seen the storm was one thing; having seen it immediately stop was another.

We know that fear is a common experience of those who find themselves in the presence of God.

Isaiah 6:4-5, “⁴And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. ⁵Then I said,

“Woe is me, for I am ruined!

Because I am a man of unclean lips,

And I live among a people of unclean lips;

For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.”

Ezekiel 1:28, “As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.”

Exodus 34:6-8, “⁶Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.’ ⁸Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship.”

The question they asked, though, was the right one, “Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?” (v. 25). Who, indeed, but God. Many of the troubles of this world can be fixed. Doctors can heal diseases, mechanical things that break can be fixed, family problems can be solved. But it takes God to change the weather. And this God loved them. I wonder if Peter recalled this when he wrote “⁶Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6-7).

Storms come of many reasons. Jonah faced a storm because of his disobedience, these disciples faced a storm while they were walking, literally, with Jesus. We, too, will face storms. Some will be consequences of our own bad decisions, some will be the discipline of a loving God, some will be to test and strengthen our faith. We, too, will need to answer the question “Where is your faith?”

Take Aways

We need to keep our faith ready to use. We ought not to let the storms of life cause us to forget Who we serve. Of course our faith is solid when things go well. It is under trial that it is proven. What good is our faith if it cannot stand storms?