

Bethel

Prayer Meeting Addresses

Number 108 The Stilling of the Storm

Reading: Mark 4. 35-41

35 And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side.

36 And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships.

37 And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.

38 And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake

him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?

39 And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

40 And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?

41 And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

Address

Why did the Lord Jesus constrain His disciples to get into the ship and sail to the other side? Well, we have the answer very clear as we begin the following chapter. There was a vessel of mercy there, the mad Gadarene, a dreadful character, that no-one could tame or even bind with chains. You would say an impossible case, but the appointed time had now arrived, “not to propose, but call by grace,” when our Lord Jesus was to display the wonders of grace and divine, almighty power in the everlasting salvation of the mad Gadarene. That is the reason why they had to set sail.

But of course, there was a difficulty in the way: that storm. We almost wonder if it was the work of Satan to prevent the Lord going forth on His errand of mercy. But when the Lord has a work to perform, no power, either in earth or in hell, can intervene to prevent His work. O what a wonderful occasion that was!

Jesus said unto them, “Let us pass over unto the other side.” Well, as you know beloved friends, our lives here, if the Lord has dealt with us graciously, are compared to a spiritual voyage, and it begins when we have to launch forth. It is,

“Jesus, at Thy command
We launch into the deep,”

and *nothing* can prevent us coming to our desired haven, and the reason is, because the Lord Jesus is with us in the ship, and with Jesus in the ship, we can smile at the storm.

So as surely as the Lord begins a good work, constrains us to follow Him, to launch forth, so surely one day we shall be brought to our desired haven. Jesus said, “Let us pass over unto the other side,” and immediately chapter 5 begins, “And they came over unto the other side.” But there was that terrible storm in between. It must have been a trial to their faith. But don’t you find so often, if the Lord leads you in a special pathway, or if He sweetly constrains you to launch forth in some way you have never gone before, and you are sure the Lord was in it, you are sure you have not made a mistake, then things begin to go wrong? You wonder if you have made a mistake, if you never should have set out in this way. But the Lord will try your faith, and surely show His ability and divine, almighty power to still every storm, however vicious, not only to bring you safely through at last, but to bring you through that present trial.

“And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.” These sudden storms, even today, are very frequent on the Sea of Galilee. It is clear from the words here, and also in Matthew and Luke, that it was not any ordinary storm. The Word of God does not exaggerate. It was “a great storm.” The waves were even beating into the ship, and not only so, but the ship was full of water. In other words, naturally speaking they were in danger of immediate death. There used to be a saying with the old preachers, it is good for the ship to be in the sea, but it is very solemn when the sea begins to get into the ship. And beloved friends, that was just what was happening there.

Really, in one word, they were *overwhelmed*. So you and I, sooner or later, will come into these storms – greater storms, lesser storms, things we cannot manage ourselves, things which sometimes come suddenly. They take us by surprise, but this storm did not take the Lord Jesus by surprise. “Known unto God are all His works” – and all His ways – “from the beginning of the world.”

But there are so many things that can bring these storms in our lives, in our Christian voyage. Sometimes it is a disappointment; sometimes a sorrow; sometimes a bereavement. Some have some trouble where they work, or in the office, or the hospital, or at school. Then of course there are those spiritual storms, when perhaps they come so severe and so sudden. It seems that they are going to overwhelm you – sin, the temptations of Satan. You wonder where the scene will end.

This terrible storm. Of course, at the present time we cannot help but think of this virus, this terrible coronavirus, and really it is like a great storm that is overwhelming many, carrying away some by death, and all human power, though it can ease things, it cannot prevent it. There is a similarity this evening between the state we are in as a nation, and even as a congregation at Bethel, a striking similarity to this storm on the Sea of Galilee – a great storm, the waves beating into the ship, so that it was now full. And where was the Lord Jesus? Well, He was in the ship with them, but “He was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow.”

I just want to make two comments on that. First: amidst all that seemed to be a dreadful calamity, seemed to be bringing destruction, our Lord Jesus was perfectly calm. He was not troubled by it. He knew what He was going to do; He always does. And whilst His disciples were full of terror, and so agitated, and not knowing what to do, the dear Lord Jesus was sleeping peacefully in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow.

But then the second thing here: we have a clear view of the real, proper, sacred humanity of the Lord Jesus – a real Man, though completely free from any kind of sin; impeccable, capable of being tempted – the mystery of it – but it was impossible He could sin, because His sacred humanity was in indissoluble union with His divine Person, and the Godhead could not sin. But He was tempted as we are, and here He was weary, He was tired, and He fell asleep.

Of course, this is an attractive point to the Lord’s people. Here is the Saviour who understands and knows and cares. It is very beautifully opened up in those opening chapters in the Epistle to the Hebrews. “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are.”

“He was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow” – the difference between the Lord Jesus and His disciples! But His love was still the same. He was still caring for them, never in a hurry, but never too late. He waits to be

gracious. What did these disciples do? They awoke Him. It is a strange thing – all the noise of that raging sea did not wake Him, but the poor, feeble cry of His disciples did! There is a lot of divinity there. “He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when He shall hear it, He will answer thee” – a prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God. He waits that He may be gracious.

“They awake Him, and say unto Him, Master, carest Thou not that we perish?” Now I have always felt that this is one of the worst prayers in the whole of the Word of God! There was not much prayer in it, and they almost accused our Lord Jesus that He did not care. It was a poor prayer, but it received a very good and gracious answer! I have often thought about this, and of course at Bethel you have often heard me mention it: the poor prayers of Scripture, the blessed answers that they received.

Just to give you one other example: Elijah under the juniper tree. “Take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.” Actually, he never did die! The Lord answered that prayer so beautifully, when He caused him to sleep, and then He sent an angel. That angel baked a cake for him, and then he slept again. But then that loving word: “Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee.” That was just what poor Elijah was thinking: the journey was too great for him, and the Lord lovingly told him that He knew exactly what he was thinking. But, “Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he ... went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights.”

O these wonderful answers to poor prayers! All we can say is, it is mercy, undeserved mercy, from first to last. O but it is an encouragement to us. Sometimes when we try to pray, it may be concerning our souls, sin and eternity, seeking salvation through the Redeemer’s precious blood, or it may be something that has come upon us in providence that is troubling us, and when we have finished, we do feel the poverty of our prayers. And then to realise that prayers are answered *for Jesus’ sake*.

But what a prayer: “Master, carest Thou not that we perish?” Then we see the majesty and glory of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He was in complete control. He knew what to do. He immediately dealt with this poor prayer of His disciples. He arose majestically “and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.” The winds, the waves, the sea obey Him – these inanimate creatures, and all the Lord has to do is to speak, and immediately they obey. O what a lesson we have, that “all creatures obey His command,” and they do it immediately!

“He ... said unto the sea, Peace be still,” and immediately “there was a great calm.” So often after a storm ceases, the sea is very choppy for quite a time afterwards. It was not here. “There was a great calm.” I wonder with some of you this evening, if the Lord has ever caused a great calm in your life, in your feelings, in your circumstances, when everything seemed to be in a turmoil. “Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm” – the power, the divine power of Almighty God. If the poor disciples were overwhelmed, they knew now what a deliverance is. It was a wonderful deliverance. It was a miracle.

“Sooner all nature shall change,
Than one of God’s promises fail.”

He has promised to deliver. He has said, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble: *I will deliver thee*, and thou shalt glorify Me.” Really, the Word of God is a Book of deliverances, and our little lives are lives of deliverance. O the power of the word of God! “Where the word of a king is, there is power.”

Thinking about this coronavirus, it could not possibly have happened without divine permission – may we always remember that – and if it were the Lord’s will, He could say, “Peace, be still,” even this evening, and it would cease; it would come to an end. But we do not know what the Lord’s purpose is. We know He has a voice in it. May we be given grace to hear it. We do not know how long it may go on. The world lieth in wickedness. The Lord once drowned the whole world. But there is a voice in this. May we in our little measure be encouraged still to pray that the Lord will graciously protect us in our homes and lives and families and circumstances, give us a hiding place, and may we prove that all these strange things, all the things which have happened, might fall out “rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.” I told my congregation on Lord’s day evening, things happen, good things and bad things, but they do not *just* happen; they do not merely happen; they *fall out*. That is what Scripture says. And they fall out of the lap of divine providence. The mystery of divine providence! “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.”

But this word: “Peace, be still.” We cannot help but think of it in a gracious way, when the Lord who has made peace by the blood of His cross speaks peace to a troubled conscience. For He *did* make peace, and He gives peace, and He is our peace, and when He gives peace, who then can give trouble?

“Peace by His cross has Jesus made;
The church’s everlasting Head
O’er hell and sin has victory won,
And, with a shout, to glory gone.”

What a wonderful scripture that is: “And this Man shall be the peace.”

“And He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.” Beloved friends, there was another storm in the life of our Lord and Saviour, a more terrible storm than that on the Sea of Galilee: that storm of divine wrath and vengeance which fell on the dear Redeemer when He suffered, bled and died, bearing the sins of His people. In love and mercy to poor sinners, the Lord Jesus did not cause that storm to be still. Now He could have done, couldn’t He! How He said in the judgment hall, He could send for those legions of angels to come and deliver Him. “But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

“Jesus, arrayed in mortal form,
Of whom the prophets tell,
On His dear head, O what a storm
Of awful vengeance fell!”

But what a mercy, the willingness of our Lord Jesus as the sinner’s Surety to stand in his place and to endure the whole of that storm of divine wrath, and there make that complete atonement for sin. And He was buried, and He rose again triumphant, and He ascended into heaven, and there He for ever reigns at God’s right hand, still this same, almighty Saviour, Son of God, Son of man.

It is no wonder that the disciples “feared exceedingly,” and then said, “What manner of Man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” They learned a lesson they had never learned before. They were brought clearly to see that this Man, their Lord and Master, was the Son of God. I believe the great thing here was this: *they worshipped Him*. Beloved friends, may you and I this evening be helped to bow before Him and worship Him.

This address was given by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom, on Thursday, 16th April, 2020.

Dangers of every shape and name
Attend the followers of the Lamb,
Who leave the world’s deceitful shore,
And leave it to return no more.

O Lord, the pilot's part perform,
And guide and guard me through the storm;
Defend me from each threatening ill;
Control the waves; say, "Peace! be still!"

Amidst the roaring of the sea,
My soul still hangs her hopes on Thee;
Thy constant love, Thy faithful care,
Is all that saves me from despair.

W. Cowper

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Why those fears? behold, 'tis Jesus
Holds the helm, and guides the ship;
Spread the sails, and catch the breezes,
Sent to waft us through the deep,
To the regions
Where the mourners cease to weep.

Though the shore we hope to land on
Only by report is known,
Yet we freely all abandon,
Led by that report alone;
And with Jesus
Through the trackless deep move on.

Led by Him we brave the ocean,
Each tumultuous storm defy;
Calm amidst tempestuous motion,
Knowing that the Lord is nigh;
Waves obey Him,
And the storms before Him fly.

Rendered safe by His protection,
We shall pass the watery waste;
Trusting to His wise direction,
We shall gain the port at last;
And with wonder
Think on toils and dangers past.

T. Kelly

