

Salvation in the Storm

John 6:16-21

Introduction

Several weeks ago I told you about my friend, Mike, who had an unusual form of cancer that took root in his tongue and neck around the base of his brain. His doctors prescribed an experimental regimen form of treatments.

One day as Mike was undergoing his course of treatments, I was visiting with him at his kitchen table. Mike had gone from 180 pounds to 90 pounds. His hair was gone. His face was gaunt. His whole body seemed to be thin fabric draped over empty bones. Yet there was a certain joy and determination that remained in Mike's eyes.

As we were visiting I noticed a strange looking white mask lying on the table. Mike was the father of three active boys and he played sports like rugby for a hobby, so I thought at first it might be some sort of athletic mask. I picked it up and decided it was the weirdest sports mask I'd ever seen. It had no padding and it conformed tightly to the shape of a face. It had only small openings for the eyes, nostrils and mouth. It sides wrapped clear around the side of the head, and had what appeared to large latches attached to each side.

My curiosity got the best of me, and I asked, "Mike, what is this?" And he says, "Oh, that's my mask." "Mask for what?" I said. "For my radiation therapy," he replied.

Now therapy sounds pretty innocuous. You know, something mild and safe. What he then described was one of the most horrific things I've ever heard.

They had to shoot radiation into Mike's head, but it had to be done very precisely because of the brain. To insure this they had to completely immobilize Mike. They strapped him onto a gurney so his body couldn't move. Then they took this mask. It had been custom made for Mike. They put a mold on his face and then formed the mask from the mold. They would place this mask to Mikes head, and then clamp it down to the gurney, so his head was completely immobilized. The only thing on Mike's head that could move was his eyelids.

They then slid his gurney into the radiation tube and closed the door. Each session lasted 30 minutes and once it started, they couldn't stop. Mike described it as 30 minutes of pure hell. The radiation bombarding him made him uncontrollably sick, and he would vomit again and again. However, since he couldn't turn his head, vomit would come right back down into his mouth and nose. Several times Mike thought he would suffocate or drown in his own vomit. To breath he had to swallow it, and then he would throw it right back up again.

Mike said it was the scariest thing he ever faced. First, he thought he would die. Then he wished he could. He determined in the darkness of that sickening tube that he would rather die of cancer than ever go through that again. He was a defeated man. He had given up.

But at some point, in his most desperate moment he cried out to Jesus as he never had. Though his mouth couldn't open he screamed with all he had for Jesus to save him. Somehow, that eternal 30 minutes came to an end. Somehow, by the grace of God, he endured several more rounds of “therapy.” One thing I know though. The Mike that first went into that tube and the Mike that came out of it, the one sitting across from me were two different people. This was a humble and gentle Mike. This was a Mike that understood and accepted that he wasn't in control. This was a Mike that sought and appreciated the help of others.

Though rather extreme, Mike's experience illustrates a principle that is far more common that we'd like to admit. The cure can be scarier than the disease. To get better, some things have to get worse. This is why some people never get better. And don't think I'm just talking about physical illness. I'm talking about life.

Our Scripture today is another well-known event from the life of Christ. In fact, the image of walking on water has become synonymous with supernatural power. From music videos to movies, the idea of walking on water is symbol of the miraculous.

(Watch Video)

The story is found in three of the gospels Matthew, Mark, and John. John however leaves out the part of the story that is usually most people's favorite- Peter walking on the water. John seems to want to draw our attention to other aspects of the event. Putting the details from all three gospels together we get a fuller sense of what is going on here.

After Jesus had miraculously fed the crowd of thousands, the people wanted to crown him as their earthly king. They wanted Jesus as their ultimate government entitlement program. That was not the kind of kingdom Jesus was looking to build. Verse 15 says, “*Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself*”

Jesus sent the disciples on ahead in the boat without him. Perhaps they too were tempted by thoughts of Jesus in some earthly office. Jesus needed to get them away, and he needed to get away from the crowds. So Jesus puts his disciples in a boat and sends them on ahead while Jesus goes into the hills to pray. As the disciples sail across the Sea of Galilee, they leave one sort of

storm behind only to sail straight into another.

I. **There Will Be Storms**

The geography of Galilee makes it subject to sudden and violent storms. The surrounding hills act like wind tunnels for the cooler air blowing in from higher elevations, where it mixes with the warmer air of the sea basin. This results in a witches brew of sudden temperature and pressure changes, and a storm suddenly erupts.

This is exactly what happens to the disciples. They begin their journey in the evening as the sun is setting, probably around six in the evening. The water is calm when they leave, but things quickly change. Matthew tells us that disciples saw Jesus walking on the water during the fourth watch of the night. That means it was between 3 — 6 in the morning. So the disciples have been rowing for nine to twelve straight hours, and they have only made it about three and a half miles across the lake, that's little more than halfway to their destination. They've been rowing all night against the wind and the waves, and they're getting nowhere.

Can you identify with their situation? Do you ever feel like you're paddling for all you're worth and getting nowhere? You're giving your all, everything you've got, and you're doing good to stay where you are.

Sometimes life is like that. If there is anything we can learn from this passage it is there will be storms. Every life will experience times of trial. We will face setbacks. We will suffer failure. And sometimes these storms will be beyond our ability to handle on our own. Between the launch and the landing come troubled waters.

And just because you're faithfully following Jesus doesn't exempt you from the storm either. Matthew and Mark both point out that Jesus is the one who put them in the boat and sent them onto the lake. They got in at his command. I emphasize this because obedience and faithfulness does not guarantee that you will be spared adversity. Contrary to what many guys on TV and radio teach, being a good, trusting Christian doesn't spare you from the storms of life. Jesus does not promise us smooth sailing.

Jesus does promise he'll help us through the storms. He does promise that there will be nothing that will keep us from getting to where he wants to take us, but the course to get there passes through stormy seas.

James 1:2 says, "*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.*" Notice it doesn't say "if you face trials," but it says "when."

1 Peter 1:3-7 says,

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

Notice that Peter promises us that we will be given an eternal inheritance that is kept in heaven for us, but he also reminds us that in the here and now we will suffer grief in a great variety of troubles.

II. Jesus Comes in the Midst of the Storm

The fact that we will face storms in life doesn't mean that God has neglected you or abandoned you to face these storms alone. Jesus will come. Jesus will help. Jesus will save, but he does in his time.

Jesus doesn't rescue them before the storm starts. Remember He's the one who sent them into the storm. He doesn't rescue them at the beginning of the storm either. I think we'd like it better if Jesus shows up just as the wind begins to howl and the waves begin to kick up, and he says, "Aren't you glad I'm here. It's good that you follow me. If you didn't, you'd have to go through this storm, but I'll save you from it."

But that's not how it happens. Jesus doesn't show up for the longest time. It's not until they have rowed and battled and winds and waves all night. It's not until they've reached their point of exhaustion. It's not until they are about to give up, that Jesus shows up. Sometimes, when the wind begins to blow and waves begin to pound against us, we wonder, "Where is God?" "How come Jesus doesn't save me?" We need to remember that God sends us into the storm. Jesus doesn't always come before the storm or at the beginning. He comes in the midst of the storm.

III. The Savior Can Be Scarier than the Storm

Its one thing to know t at Jesus comes in the midst of the storm, but it isn't very reassuring. We wonder why does he let us feel alone? Why doesn't he give us some reminder that he's still there that he's still in control? Why couldn't he at least give us a sign? Why let us sail into the storm that we can't get through on our own?

The answer is very important, yet it is something rarely talked about. The reason is this. The Savior Can be scarier than the Storm. Like my friend Mike who thought it would be better to

suffer and die from cancer than go through the treatments. Look at the end of verse 19 and the beginning of 20. *“They saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. But he said to them, “It is I; don’t be afraid.”*

They have been rowing for hours in one of scariest storms these seasoned fishermen had ever seen, and what frightens the disciples? Jesus. Matthew tells us they think they’ve seen a ghost. It’s in this moment that they realize Jesus is bigger and badder than the storm. Here he is strolling across the water, and the wind doesn’t faze him. The waves have no effect. Suddenly, the storm isn’t the scariest thing out there. That’s why Jesus sends you into the storm. That’s why he comes to you in the midst of the storm, because it’s only in the storm he can see how big and bad he truly is.

Jesus is no wimpy Savior who just show us to meet you for coffee when thing are going good. No, He is the almighty Son of God who shows up in the middle of the worse that life can throw at you, and not be bothered one bit. That’s the kind of Savior I want to follow.

We like to think that our education, our experience, our abilities, our resources will be sufficient enough to handle whatever life throws at us. Or maybe we feel inadequate, and we think that if just had more education, more experience, better abilities, or greater resources, then we could handle life's problems. But the truth is this-in the voyage of life we will all face raging storms that we cannot sail through on our own. The disciples here are a case in point. These guys aren't noobs, they're not amateurs sailing Galilee. They are professionals, fishermen by trade. They are seasoned veterans who've sailed these waters hundreds of times. Yet the storm is beyond them. Their experience and skill can't save them from the storm.

To let Jesus take over means admitting we can't cut it on our own. It means recognizing we don't have what it takes. It means giving up the illusion of control. That's a very scary thing.

That's why Jesus comes when the wind is its fiercest and the waves are at their highest. It is not until they hit bottom, that many people are willing to let Jesus help them up.

Jesus waits until the very worst part of the storm to show up, because he knows we won't give him the wheel at any other point. It is not until we reach our point of desperation that we're willing to give up control.

He comes at the point that we are most likely to turn to him. If he comes at any other point we will still think that we can still handle it on our own, or we will be unwilling to trust our lives to him completely. So Jesus takes us to the extreme of our limits. Dale Bruner points out

that, “Human extremity is the frequent meeting place with God.”

If Jesus always saved us before the storm, or before it got real bad, our faith would remain small. We wouldn't grow in our trust. Imagine if Jesus magically transported the disciples across the lake without them ever facing the storm, would their faith have grown, would their relationship with Jesus be deepened. Without the storm the disciples would be the same. The storm makes us better and bigger people. Let me read the rest of passages I started earlier.

1 Peter 1:6-7

7 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds. These have come so that your faith-of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

James 1:2-5

In this you greatly rejoice, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

IV The Storm Doesn't Have the Last Word

Jesus lets us experience enough of the storm that it changes who we are. It changes our attitude and how we think. It changes our faith and our relationship with him. Jesus wants to take us from where we are to where we need to go, but he wants to transform us in the process.

But here is the promise. Here is the assurance that we have. The storm does not have the last word. The last word does not lie with the storm; it lies with the one who walks upon it. If we look to Jesus and let him in the boat, he will get us through the storm. Did you notice what the text says, “*Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.*” He instantly transports them to their destination. They had to face the storm, they had to experience the storm, but Jesus came in the midst of the storm, and the storm did not have the last word.

1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

“A way out” here doesn't mean avoiding or skipping the test. In the original Greek, this means “a way through.” Jesus doesn't provide salvation by allowing us to bypass the test, he helps us through it. When we trust in Jesus the storm never has the last word.

Conclusion

I don't know what storms you're facing this morning. Maybe you've been sailing smooth waters, but a storm will come, and you need to remember these lessons. Some of you have just recently gotten through the storm and you know well the truth of what I'm saying. It was a hard experience at the time, but now looking back you can see what God was trying to accomplish by letting you go through it. He has made you bigger and better people as a result of it. He provided you a way through it.

But what about those of you who are in the midst of the storm this morning? Are you still rowing furiously thinking you can sail through on your own? Do you think you have the strength, the ability, the experience, the resources to make it on your own? Or are you desperate enough to welcome Jesus about the boat of your life, and let him control the rudder.

Watchman Nee wrote about a Chinese man who was drowning. Several of his friends were watching him struggle in the water, but they themselves could not swim. They yelled out for help and one man raced to the shoreline. He assured them that he could indeed swim and save the man, but he just sat there and waited. The others became indignant at his unwillingness to take action. Finally, the drowning man exhausted of all energy gave up his struggle and sunk beneath the surface. Then the waiting man jumped in the water and pulled the drowning man to safety.

His friends demanded an explanation for his apparent reluctance to save the man. He simply told them that he was unable to save the man as long as he was still trying to save himself.

Our efforts to save ourselves leave us flailing in an ocean of sin. Until we give up on the idea that we can save ourselves, we can't be saved. We must acknowledge our own inability to bring about salvation and embrace the salvation that only Jesus can provide.