

## Stories of the Master

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### SM023 – The Perfect Storm

How long could Jesus keep up his pace and the demands that were upon him? Everywhere he went, people surrounded him, wanting to touch him for healing, clawing their way through the crowds to be near him. At times, he would teach for hours. At other times, he would heal what seemed like an endless line of sad and hurting souls. Then, he would often have to contend with the anger of the religious rulers who pressured him to conform to their way of doing things, to stop what he was doing, or face severe consequences. Many thought his life was in danger, and the toll it took on Jesus could be seen in his face. After another long day of teaching, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s all get into the boat and go to the other side of the lake.” At last, it seemed they could take a break. This would be good for Jesus and for his disciples who shared his busy schedule.

The men gathered their supplies and put out from the shore – a nice sail on the lake would be a refreshing way to spend their afternoon. Jesus went to the stern and lay down on a cushion. Within moments he was sound asleep, and the disciples relaxed and enjoyed the beauty of God’s wonderful creation.

Soon, however, the wind started to pick up. The disciples who were seasoned fishermen looked with concern at the storm clouds in the distance and hoped and prayed that they would not head their way. Storms on the Sea of Galilee could arise so quickly and make it perilous.

One of the disciples said to them all. “We better get ready. That storm looks like it is headed straight for us. I think we can ride it out but you never know on this lake.”

Another one said, “Should we wake Jesus and tell him?”

“No, let him sleep. Maybe the storm won’t be so bad or it will go around us. He needs his rest, anyway.”

But soon, the wind picked up more speed and began to blow fiercely upon them. The waves rose and the water began to splash over the sides of the boat. They let down their sails to ride it out, but the boat still tossed about dangerously.

“I can’t believe Jesus is sleeping through this storm. He must be exhausted,” they said. And as Jesus slept the storm grew even fiercer. Soon, the boat began to take on dangerous amounts of water and the fishermen realized they were in danger. With every ounce of energy, they bailed water out of the boat but it seemed the water was coming on faster than they could remove it. Another large wave crashed over them and the wind roared even stronger. The boat went dizzily high on a wave and then raced down the other side. None of these men had ever encountered a storm like this.

“We’re going to die,” one of them said. “Our lives can’t end like this. Jesus’ life can’t end like this. God help us! God save us!”

Finally, one of the disciples ran to Jesus in the stern, still sound asleep and yelled, “Jesus, Master, we are perishing! Don’t you care about what is happening?”

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Jesus rubbed his eyes, took a deep breath and focused. He looked about at the boat. He looked at his men. He looked at the storm around them. Then, he stood up, made his way to the front of the boat and said in a loud voice, “Hush! Be still!”

Some of the disciples thought he was speaking to them. How could they be quiet when they were in an emergency. They needed to shout out their encouragement and instructions to keep the boat from sinking. How could they be still when they had to work so hard to keep the boat from sinking?

But Jesus wasn't speaking to them. He wasn't even looking at them. He was looking right into the eye of the storm. In a matter of moments, the wind began to die down and the waves became calmer. The clouds began to dissipate, and the sun began to shine. Then, the lake was perfectly at peace and they were saved.

Jesus turned to the disciples and said, “Why were you afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

The disciples were speechless. They were not speechless because of what Jesus had just said, but they were speechless for what they had just witnessed. Jesus had slept through a storm and then calmed the worst storm they had ever seen on this lake. With a few words, Jesus had turned a raging storm into a gentle breeze and they began to say to one another, “Who is this man? Even the wind and the sea obey his word!” And they began to be very afraid.

“What would you have done in this situation?”

Let's think about this story and see what we can learn from it.

First, it is important to realize that Jesus is the one who suggested they go to the other side. Jesus initiated the journey and one of the lessons he wanted to teach his disciples and us is that following him does not mean we are exempt from difficulties. We may experience storms because we do follow Jesus. The question we must ask ourselves is, “will we continue to follow Jesus even through the storms?”

Second, Jesus did not seem overly concerned. He was with them, and he was asleep. It had been a long, strenuous day. He was exhausted, and it did not take much to put him into a deep rest. But then the storm came and he continued sleeping. The danger did not arouse him. Let me ask you this – has it ever seemed like God was asleep or not paying attention when you were in a storm?”

Many years before this, King David wrote these words, “Arise O Lord in your anger. Lift up Yourself against the rage of my adversaries. Arouse yourself for me!” (Psalm 7:6)

“Stir up yourself and awake to my right and to my cause my God and my Lord.” (Psa 35:23)

“Arouse yourself, why do you sleep O Lord. Awake, do not reject us forever!” (Psa 44:23)

This is exactly what was happening to the disciples. They were obeying the Lord. They got into the boat as he said and were on their way to the other side as he had directed. Then a storm came up and Jesus was doing nothing about it. Jesus was sleeping!

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The disciples had three reactions to the storm.

First, they were timid. To be timid means to shrink from danger or risk. They were cowardly.

What could they have done to show courage? Well, they could have called upon God in faith to help them. Or, they could have tried to calm the wind and waves in the name of Jesus. Jesus, after all, had said he would give them authority to heal and cast out demons. Why not try to calm the storm as well in his name? They could have asked Jesus to control the situation in faith. They could have said, “Lord, there is a life-threatening storm upon us. But we are not afraid. Just say the word and we will be saved. Lord you changed the water into wine. You can change this storm into a gentle breeze.”

But they did not do any of those things. They were shrinking from danger. All they had learned seemed to get blown away by the wind and washed overboard with the waves.

Second, the disciples panicked. They said, “Master, master, we are perishing.” Doesn’t it strike you odd that they said, “**we** are perishing.” The “we” includes Jesus. “Jesus we are all going to drown! You too!”

Now, let me ask you this – “how likely was it that God would let his anointed one, Jesus, die this way? Die by accident? Those disciples were as secure as Jesus. And this teaches us an important lesson. You and I, if we are in Christ, are just as secure as Jesus is today. We don’t know the time or manner of our death. But if we walk in obedience to the Lord we can have the assurance that we are as safe as Jesus Christ.”

**Friends, it is safer to be in a boat in the middle of a lake in a raging storm in the will of God than on the dry land and be in disobedience to him.**

Here is the third response of the disciples. They questioned his love. They said, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are perishing?” Don’t you care?

This question hurts the heart of God the most – questioning his love. And this may be the most crucial response of the three because timidity and panic deal with the circumstances around us but this response, questioning his care, strikes at the heart of God and his relationship with us.

What was at the root of their wrong reaction? Why did the disciples fail? Why were they timid, panicking, questioning his love? Jesus said they had “no faith.”

They had already seen Jesus exert authority in other circumstances but they did not connect it to this situation. They did not stop and say, “If Jesus exerted power before, he can do it again.”

King David made that connection when he lived. As a young shepherd, he killed a lion and a bear to protect his sheep. Then when the giant Goliath challenged the armies of Israel, David made the connection – “if my God can empower me to kill a lion and a bear, he can empower me to kill a giant.”

Can you and I do this? Can we build faith for the storms of life that come our way? Yes, we can! We can gain victories in our smaller, daily challenges so that when the big ones come we will be ready like David

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who killed a lion and a bear was ready for Goliath. We must remember our victories by the power of God and say, “If God could do it there and then, he can do it here and now.”

There is a second reason why the disciples had no faith. They saw Jesus exert authority for others in desperate situations – think of the paralyzed man. Think of the man who had been lame for 38 years. But they failed to connect those miracles to their own desperate need. They did not say, “Lord, if you did it for them, you can do it for me.”

How can we build faith in the storm? By observing God’s work for others and connecting it to our own challenges.

There is a third reason why the disciples failed. They forgot what the original instruction was and who gave it. If they had remembered they could have said, “Lord, I’m not here to drown. You told us to get into the boat and to go to the other side. I believe you will get us there!” And we must remember his word to us especially when the storm is raging around us.

The disciples were happy again. The sea was calm. The weather was beautiful. The sails were now up on their boat and they were rapidly making it to the other side of the lake.

But what they did not realize was that another storm was waiting – just as severe and perhaps more deadly. And when we get back, we will see what it was.

### Interlude

Many months before the storm on the sea of Galilee, another storm had started in the heart of a man. Fear would come upon him for the things he had seen and done. He would wake up screaming in the middle of the night, and only his wife’s soothing voice could calm him.

Then, during the day, the fear started coming. His wife could see it in his eyes and she shrank back in horror and protected the children as he would go into a violent rage. “I don’t know what to do,” she would say to her friends. “This evil comes over him and he is not himself. I fear for him and I am afraid he will hurt the children or me.”

One day screams were heard in the village. The wife ran to the door of her humble home and to her horror she saw her husband in a violent rage yelling and throwing things at people. He ran to the gate of a small estage, broke it off its hinges effortlessly and hurled that at the villagers. Where did he get such strength?

“Let me go to him,” she said, but as the woman ran to her husband he looked upon her with rage and began to attack her. Several men ran to her rescue and with every ounce of strength subdued him. “Get some ropes, get some chains, get anything, we can barely hold him down. Hurry,” they said to the other villagers.

When they tied him up, the man began to scream in anguish. “No, no, this cannot happen to me!” His face turned red. His voice took on an inhuman quality and with rage he screamed again, “This will not

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happen to me. This cannot happen to me.” With superhuman strength and a sneering, animal-like look on his face he broke the ropes and the chains as if they were twigs and string.

The villagers gasped at what they had just seen but they were not prepared for the next action for the man began to take off his clothes, shaming his family and laughing with scorn at the weakness of those around him. Then he screamed one more time, “you have no idea who I am,” and with supernatural speed ran away from the village to the tombs where the dead lay in silence.

There the man lived for days and weeks. From time to time he would sneak into the village and steal food but he would quickly return to the abode of the dead – the only place where he felt welcome. From time to time the villagers could hear his yells and screams. Some brave souls would venture to the edge of the tombs to see if they could see the crazed man and what they saw revolted them. His hair had grown long and shaggy. His naked body deeply burned by the sun and thinning for lack of proper nourishment and there were scars all over his body – scars from when he would take sharp stones and gouge his flesh for the pleasure and the pain of seeing his blood flow freely.

Few dared to venture that way and only the herders of swine would come close. From time to time they would see the remains of a pig and they knew it was the crazed man who had taken one, but that was a small price to pay for his staying away from them.

One day, the man had ventured close to the eastern shores of the Sea of Galilee. He was watching a storm like he had never seen before and laughed at the trouble it was bringing to any who might be on the lake. “Yes, yes, let it come! Let it storm! More! More!”

But then, he noticed, strangely, that the storm stopped suddenly and the whole sea became calm and soon a boat full of men talking cheerfully and bravely about their terrible ordeal on the lake. But it wasn't the men who were talking who occupied his attention. It was one man in the midst of them that bothered him. He knew who this man was and he sensed he was coming for him.

The crazed man gathered all his strength and ran toward the edge of the lake but as he drew near, the man came off the ship with speed, and strode toward the man with his arm outstretched. Their eyes locked and the man hit the ground and bowed before Jesus. Then he heard,

“Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!”

With rage and anguish in his voice he said, “No! I will not! We have no business with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God! But, but I beg You by God, do not torment me!”

“What is your name?” Jesus asked.

“My name is Legion, for we are many. But I know what you are going to do! Please, do not send us out of the country! Do not send us away. Please. Please do not send us away. Not that. No. Please.”

Just at that moment, the herd of swine with their herders came into view on a high plateau close to the lake. Jesus looked at the swine. The host of evil spirits looked at the swine.

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“The pigs. Yes, the pigs. Send us into the pigs. We’ll live there. We’ll leave this man alone, just don’t send us away. Anything but that. Send us into the pigs, please, please.”

And Jesus said, “Go.”

And with one last screaming convulsion the man collapsed to the ground like a dead man. But one second later, on the high plateau by the lake the pigs started letting out squeals of pain and anguish – 2000 of them – it was a sound like no one had heard before. Then, as if filled with madness, the pigs ran down the steep hillside straight into the lake. The herders of the swine ran after them, “Stop, stop, you stupid pigs. What are you doing? Stop.” But it was no use. Deeper and deeper into the water they ran until they were swimming and then they swam deeper still. A large gust of wind came over the lake and a huge wave swept over the pigs, and they were no more. But if you listened closely, you could hear what sounded like the screams of spirits descending into a bottomless pit.

The pig herders looked at the sea, they looked at Jesus, they looked at the man who lived among the tombs and started backing up. Then, when they felt safe, they ran with all their might for the village.

Jesus turned to the man in whom the evil spirits had lived for so long. He was weeping. His tears were tears of grief for what he had suffered for so long but they soon gave way to tears of joy and relief for he was now free from the legion of demons.

“Give him some clothes,” Jesus told his disciples. And they wrapped the man in the extra garments that some of them had carried on board. They all sat down and the man began to tell his story, clearly, cleanly, coherently. He looked at Jesus and said “Thank you Lord. Thank you for your mercy to me.” All of Jesus’ disciples surrounded the man and welcomed him into their midst and the look of joy and love from the face of Jesus washed over the man. He felt free from the plague of demons and clean as if he had been washed and made new.

A few moments later, as Jesus, the man, and Jesus’ disciples were talking, they heard voices in the distance.

“Over there, that’s where it happened. And look, there he is. There is the man who lives among the tombs and there is that other man who cast a spell over him.”

Jesus winced when he heard their conversation. “Cast a spell? Did they not know the difference between magic and the true power of God? Were these people like the Pharisees who said that he cast out demons by the power of Satan?”

The village elders walked up to Jesus and even though they saw the man who had been living among the tombs sitting peacefully, fully clothed and talking like a normal human they became extremely frightened and said to Jesus,

“We want you to leave. We don’t like this kind of magic you are performing and we don’t need your kind here. Please leave us and go back to your own people.”

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And with sorrow, Jesus got up, nodded to his disciples and started walking back into the boat and sail away.

But as the villagers watched Jesus and his disciples head to the shore, the man in whom the demons had dwelled said, “Lord, let me come with you. Please, you have been so merciful to me. I want to follow you. I want to be one of your disciples.”

Jesus smiled at the man, looked deeply into his face and said, “No, I want you to go home and I want you to tell your people the great things the Lord has done for you.”

The man was quiet for a moment. He looked deep in Jesus’ eyes and said, “Yes, Master. I will do that.” He then embraced Jesus and watched as he and his disciples got into their boat. The wind picked up, the sails were hoisted, and soon they were out of sight. The man stayed on the shore as long as he could see Jesus, and when he could see him or the boat no longer, he turned and headed home with peace and joy in his heart.