

A Series of Storms

“Sometimes We’re In a Storm Because We Obey”

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Good morning. Wow. I’m not going to ask you how you’re all doing today because I understand what’s been going on. And I just want to say it’s a privilege and it’s an honour to be with you today and to share with you in this moment in this time. It’s a privilege to be able to help out Pastor Kim and just to kind of step in and give him a chance to breathe, because we all need to do that. So, it’s a pleasure and an honour for me to be here today.

I did find it rather ironic, though, a couple of things: that I’m going to speak shortly – I don’t know as I’ve ever been accused of speaking shortly before – and something that starts promptly at 12:30. I’m glad they didn’t tell us the day that that was supposed to start. So, buckle up – we’re going to be here for a while.

Quite a while ago, I actually began a series here. Go figure. It’s weird for a guest speaker to have a series going on in a different church, but we’re having some fun with it, I hope. I’m not so sure, though. I wasn’t invited back for about 6-7 months after the last one and I’m going, “Oh, my.” I wonder if that hit a little too close to home for some people, or...? We’ve been talking about storms. For those of you who haven’t been here for some of the other times I’ve been here... By the way, allow me to introduce myself for those of you who don’t know me: *speaks in Russian* Oh, sorry Rod. [laugh] We go back to before our missionary days. My wife and I were missionaries in Ukraine for a little over 13 years, and now we pastor a church out in Sherwood Park, affectionately known as The Cowboy Church. So, I didn’t wear my hat today because I wanted to prove to some people that, yes, I can preach without a hat. It *is* possible. It looks different, so I started to grow this out [points to beard] so that I’ll at least have something black around my face. Except it’s not so black anymore. That’s okay.

We started talking about storms, and the first storm that we actually talked about way back close to a year ago, we mentioned that storms are simply a fact of life. We’re either coming out of one, in the middle of one, or going into one. They’re simply a fact of life.

But we have a choice, as we looked at Jesus on the Sea of Galilee with His disciples fast asleep in the boat. [makes snoring noise] Jesus was tired that day! He was worn out, and the storm was *scaring* the disciples like crazy. And these, we’ve got to remember, are professional fishermen. They weren’t like me, who, you know, with a light wind on the sea and, you know, little breakers scare... well, no, I’m not *that* timid. But these are professional fishermen, and they were frightened for their lives. And they wake Jesus and say, “Don’t you care?! We’re in a storm here! Don’t you care?” That was their accusation. “Don’t you care that we’re dying here?”

Jesus got up and looked around. “Shhh. Hey. Quiet.” And the storm vanished. And everything was calm. And Jesus said, “Why were you afraid? Don’t you have faith?” And we learned that the opposite of fear is not courage, for a Christian. The opposite of fear is *faith*. Faith in a God who *is* in control, even if He seems like He’s sleeping in the boat. In a heartbeat, when the time was right, He’d calm the storm. And so when we’re in the middle of a storm, which come and go with life, we have a choice between faith or fear what directs our thoughts, what directs our actions.

The next storm that we talked about that took me quite a while to get invited back after was Jonah. Yeah. That was a little bit harder. What happens when we are in the middle of a storm because of ME? Because of something that I did. That’s what Jonah found himself in, right? In the middle of this storm, running as far away in the opposite direction from God as he could. What a putz. Can you really get away from God? I mean, Psalm 139 had already been written: “Where can I go from Your presence? If I go to the ends of the earth, You are there.” Jonah, don’t you read scripture? You’re a prophet. Come on.

And he is running. And God sends this massive storm. But why did God send the storm? And this was so important. Did He send the storm to Jonah to punish him for the decision that he made? No. He sent the storm simply to get Jonah’s attention. “Helloooo? Jonah? You can’t run away from Me. I’m still here. Jonah.” And there was a whole lot going on. See, if it was punishment, the end result would have been radically, radically different. Because Jonah didn’t repent when the storm ended; Jonah repented when he was in the belly of the fish. He got tossed over the side, the fish came [snort] and had some lunch, and they carried on. The world’s first submarine ride.

You notice that God gave him safe passage back to where God wanted him in the first place? Probably very uncomfortable, but God got him there safely. And the fish spews him out, to use a nice word, up onto the dry ground. Can you imagine that fish’s indigestion with an ornery prophet in his belly for three days? And God said, “Jonah, do I have your attention?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, there’s Nineveh. Get going.”

See, Jonah had made a really, really stupid, deliberate choice. It wasn’t an, “oops.” This was pre-thought out. It cost him a whole lot of money, because he had to pay the fare to get on the boat to Tarshish. He had to drain his account. This was as far as he could go. I mean, he maxed his Visa card just to get there. This was so deliberate. This wasn’t an accidental little, “Oops, I sorry. I screwed up.” No. This was, “I am *running*.”

And what did God do when God brought Jonah back? “Jonah, the job is still there. That job is for you, Jonah. So head on out.” And Jonah did. It only took one storm to get Jonah’s attention. Sometimes I wish I learned as quick as Jonah did. Sometimes God has to send a storm and I come back and I say, “Okay, I’m ready.”

And God says, “Okay, go do that.”

“NO!” And I find myself running away again. It’s like, Orban, you’re an idiot. Well, some days I am.

Jonah learned after one storm. Sometimes, we’re in a storm *because* of our choice. Now, that storm is never to punish us. Be assured of that. Jesus Christ took our punishment on the cross.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

(Romans 8:1, NIV – emphasis added)

God doesn’t judge us with storms. But sometimes He throws a storm at us to get our attention, to say, “Hey, will you listen to Me?” That was the last time, when there was a big pause after that. *Whew.* Now we’re back into a nicer storm. An encouraging storm.

If you have your bibles, turn with me if you would to Matthew. And if you don’t have your bibles, why not? We’re in church, right? Sorry, just teasing. I say that to my church all the time. They usually throw things at me. No, I’m joking. I have a few familiar faces dotted around the congregation that are going, “Wait a minute. That’s not really what happens Friday night.” By the way, if you’re ever out in east Edmonton and you’re looking for something to do on a Friday night, come on out. 7:30 we start, Friday nights. Centre Park Baptist is the building that we meet in, and we would be happy to see you there. Soup’s on at 6, so if you don’t have time to eat supper before you come, come on out. Soup and sandwiches are on at 6:00, and you’re welcome to come and join us. We’d love to see you.

Matthew Chapter 14, and I’m going to start reading at verse 22. Matthew 14 verse 22, and I’m reading from the New American Standard, for those of you who are going, “Wha-, whaaaat? What’s he reading from?” Some of you I know use the “Nearly Inspired Version,” the NIV, so that’s okay. If my wife were here, she’d be throwing something at me.

Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.”

Peter said to Him, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.”

And He said, “Come!” And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and *said to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, “You are certainly God’s Son!”

(NASB)

Let’s pause for a word of prayer.

Lord Jesus, as we look into this situation that You lived through, this storm that You found Yourself in, Jesus I ask that you would open our hearts and our minds to what You want to say to us today. Lord Jesus, may my words fade into the background but may Your words burn into our souls forever. Lord Jesus, thank You for this time, and I ask Your special blessing here today. Father, bring encouragement to those who need it, bring challenge to those who need that. Be our teacher today, for Your glory, and in Your holy name, amen.

Let’s take a little bit of a look at this context. It’s kind of fun when you’re preaching from the Gospels, because you can pick the context of the situation from a totally different book, which, of course, if you’re studying in the epistles, is “the wrong way to do it.” So, let’s take a look at Mark, shall we? Mark was probably one of the sources that Matthew used as he was compiling his firsthand account, but Mark has fewer events but is more verbose about them. He expands them a little bit.

So, let’s look at Mark Chapter 6. We just want to take a quick look and see the situation surrounding this storm. One thing that we really want to see here through this is that storms don’t wait for the good days. Storms don’t happen on the days that are good, on the days that we’re prepared for them, always. So, what was really going on? In the context, we see verse 7 and following 7-13. Jesus had sent out the 12 apostles. He sent them out on a ministry tour. How many of you have ever gone out on summer ministries? Come on, I know some of you were in bible school. You’re telling me that you... We gotta talk to these folks here. Rod, you need some help in Indonesia? All right.

Sent them out on a ministry tour. Now, one thing that I can tell you is that ministry tours are exciting. They’re also exhausting. And they’re exhilarating, and draining. And so the disciples are gone. Jesus is by Himself. Now, what happens during this time that the apostles are out on ministry? As far as we can best put together, Jesus gets the news of John the Baptist’s beheading. His friends are not around Him. He’s on His own. Now, we title it this way: “John the Baptist was Beheaded.” Okay, well, that’s fine. John the Baptist was the guy who baptized Jesus. Yeah, okay, that’s fine. What was the relationship between John and Jesus? Cousins. He gets the news that one of His family has past, *violently*, at the hand of Herod, because of the whim of a vicious woman.

So, here's Jesus. His disciples are out doing ministry, He gets the news John the Baptist is beheaded, and then the disciples come back. Jesus is grieving. Jesus feels the hurt and loss. We know that Jesus was a real person; we see that when He interacts with the death of Lazarus. What did Jesus do when He got there? He wept. Jesus was a man who understood pain. It's one thing I tell my folks at church: you *never* have to apologize for tears to me. Ever. Jesus wept. Jesus is feeling this pain of this loss of His cousin. He's gone. Violently, horribly.

And the disciples come back. Now, the disciples, unfortunately, had not been able to access their Facebook accounts while they were gone, so they did not hear the news. Okay? Social media had not kept up with them. It wasn't tweeted, it wasn't even posted on Instagram. So, the disciples come back and they are pumped. They're excited. Jesus is grieving. And what does Jesus say? "Okay, guys. You know what?" I'm just kind of walking us through Mark Chapter 6 here, by the way. "Let's go to the other side of the lake. We need a few less people around us. Let's go to the other side of the lake, and we're just going to hang out for a while," because Jesus needed time to reengage with His disciples, His disciples needed time to debrief and to say, "*Gasp* You should've seen what was happening. It was so cool!" And they needed time to crash, because that's what always happens after ministry tour. Trust me. Saturday is crash day for me, Sunday afternoons, yeah, naptime. Crash time.

So they go across to the other side of the lake, but what happens? Wait a minute. Hold on. [pauses, mimics looking across a lake] "That's what I thought! That's Jesus!" And the crowds begin to see Jesus. "*Gasp* That's Jesus!" And so they run *around* the lake! They climb in the boats – those that had them – and got across, and, "*Gasp* That's Jesus!" By the time He gets to the other side of the lake for His little retreat and downtime with His disciples, *gasp* they're not so alone anymore.

Let me ask you a question. There are two miracles recorded in all four Gospels – what are they? Yes, I was a teacher at heart, which means we get pop quizzes on Sunday mornings, or Friday nights if you're at our church. What two miracles are recorded in all four Gospels? The feeding of the five thousand, and...? The resurrection. Those are the only ones that appear in all four Gospels. And that's what's about to happen now.

Jesus gets there, sees compassion on this multitude. I mean, this is a sell-out stadium; this is packed. Five thousand men, plus the women and the children. And that's just the ones who stayed for supper. We don't know how many had left already. We also don't know how many just came for the free food. Must've been some teenagers there. Free food? I'm there! Jesus had compassion on the crowd, and He spent the day teaching them. Wow. He's still grieving the loss of His cousin, His disciples: "*Gasp* We just got back from this, and we really wanted to spend time with You, Jesus, and now *frustrated exclamation*."

So, the evening is coming along, and the disciples are: “Jesus! Come on! Let’s get rid of these people!” I mean, we know the story, right? We know the situation. “Would you please shut up?!” And you thought *I* was long-winded. We’re not going to hit supertime here, so don’t worry. But Jesus is going on and on and finally, His disciples get His attention and say, “Jesus, these people are going to pass out from hunger if we don’t send them home soon!” [laugh] Jesus had a really – dare I say it? – twisted sense of humour. He looks at his disciples and says, “You feed them!” “Have you looked at this crowd?! Look at this! This is... *exasperated sigh* Yeah, right!”

So Jesus asked, “Well, how much food do you have? As far as you know, everybody brought a lunch.”

The disciples hadn’t gotten that far yet. So Phillip, “I’ve got one kid here with five loaves and two fishes. That’s it.”

Jesus said, “Cool, we’ve got a start. Bring ‘em.”

And the disciples were involved in one of the most amazing miracles that Jesus did, feeding all of those people from five loaves and two fish. Wow!

And then, and then, He turns his disciples into waiters, and the clean-up crew. The crowd eats, the crowd is still standing around and Jesus says, “All right, go pick up the leftover food. Don’t let anything go to waste.” He was a good Ukrainian. Twelve baskets! Do you realize that’s one basket per disciple? Each disciple’s basket was full! Of course, we’re not told the size of the baskets, but it was enough *after* everything was done, to feed the 12 disciples. Twelve baskets. Wow.

And here, we pick it up, back into Matthew again. We’ve walked through Mark Chapter 6. Let’s go back to Matthew Chapter 14. This is the context. This is the background for what we’re about to look at here.

Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary.

(NASB)

Immediately – verse 22 – He made the disciples get into the boat, and go ahead of Him, while *He* sent the crowds away. What a nice guy!

“I’ll tell you what, guys. You go ahead, *you* go to the other side; I’ll take care of the people. You’re tired, you’re worn out. Shoo. Go. Get out of here. I’ll take care of business in the crowd.”

Yes! What a nice guy, right? Wait a minute. Who is Jesus? Not a trick question. Three letters, in English or Russian. Jesus is? God. How much does Jesus know? Did Jesus know there was a storm coming? Wait a minute! Whose idea was this?

Take a look at this again:

Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side.

(NASB)

If you don't hear anything else, hear this: Sometimes, we're in a storm *because* we obey. Sometimes, we find ourselves in the worst storm imaginable *because* God has sent us into it. Not for something that we did wrong. Not to get our attention. But simply because that's the way He wants it. He's God, after all. He can do whatever He chooses. It's not up to *me*, a created being to say, [in pained voice] "Why me?" Although, I've said that a lot. That's only natural; that's only human. But in the midst of that, we have to always remember: God is God. I am not. God knows things that I can't even possibly begin to fathom. Why? It's *His* domain; not mine. Sometimes, we're in a storm simply because God puts us there. Sometimes we're in a storm *because* we obey.

Last storm we looked at, Jonah was in a storm *because* he *disobeyed*. The disciples now find themselves in a storm *because* they obeyed. So, just because you're in a storm, doesn't mean you've done anything wrong. Doesn't mean, [in pained voice] "Ah! God's punishing me." Or, "God's out to get me." Maybe. But not necessarily. Sometimes we're in a storm – and you hear me saying this often and often and often, because I want you to walk out of here with this – sometimes the storm is God's making, because that's what He wants for you.

So let's look further.

And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw Him...

(NASB)

They screamed out. And I'll go quiet to emphasize instead of screaming out. There's a church in Ukraine that knows me as the preacher who screams. [in dramatic whispered voice] "It's a ghost!" The disciples were petrified. "It's a ghost! It's a ghost!"

Jesus said, "Wait, wait – hold up there! Relax. [in commanding voice] It is *I*." I'm sure that's not how He said it.

"Yo! It's just me! Chill! It's okay. I got this. It's just me."

Take a look at this timeframe. If you're reading the New American Standard, you go, "I don't understand the time."

"In the fourth watch of the night." Did they change watches in the middle of the night, or what? If you're reading the NIV, it says, "Just before dawn," or something like that. The fourth watch of the night is sometime between 3 and 6 in the morning. During that time: 3:00-6:00 in the morning. How long had the disciples been in the boat? Since the previous evening, fighting for their lives. This isn't that big of a lake; it didn't take them that long to get across, and they've been fighting this storm for *hours*.

When you're in a boat, in a lake, in a storm that's threatening your life, five *minutes* seems like hours, hours seem like *days*, and Jesus left them there, while He was praying. He left them there for hours. He sent them into it, and left them there for hours. But one thing I want us to see. What did Jesus do? Prayer time is done. "Thank you, Father. It's been an amazing worship time." But He communed with His Father, and He got up, and He said, "It's time to go for a walk." So where does He go? Do you notice this?

And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them.

(NASB – emphasis added)

We miss that oftentimes. See, He knew *exactly* where they were. Exactly. He didn't go out to look for them. He didn't go, "Now, I sent those guys out, the storm has probably blown them off, so I'll look somewhere over in that direction." He came to them, walking on the water. Jesus knew exactly where they were. They were *never* out of His mind. He knew exactly where they were, *exactly* what was going on, and Jesus came straight to them. Jesus initiated the saving process. Jesus said, "My boys need some help – I'm going to go help them." And He walked straight out towards them.

Let me ask you a question: Have you ever been afraid of your rescuer? They were. They didn't recognize the rescue. "It's a ghost!"
What was Jesus coming to do? To rescue them! What did they think?
"Aaaahhh!" [frightened exclamations]

You see, we have a tendency to make the disciples and make Jesus less than us, less than people. You know, guys, they even went to the bathroom! Okay? These are real people! These are normal and they have the same kind of fears and actions and reactions that you and I do! If you were out in the boat between 3:00 and 6:00 in the morning, had been fighting for your life for the last eight hours, and you saw somebody walking on top of the storm waves towards you, what would *you* think?! Holy...!
[frightened exclamation] Now you're getting the picture of what the disciples were in! They were terrified! But what does Jesus say?
"Hey! Hey! *Whistles* It's just Me. Relax. Relax. It's just Me. I got this."

[laugh] I love Peter. Peter gives me hope. I know you've been through a series in the not-too-distant past on 2 Peter; we're in the middle of the epistles of Peter, and we started that with a little glimpse of his life. But man – Peter gives me hope! I mean, when Peter was a disciple before the Day of Pentecost, the only reason Peter opened his mouth was to switch feet, or to see if he could get both in at one time. I mean, this guy opened his mouth, did something, and *then* engaged his brain two days later. Whoa, man, Peter! This guy gives me hope. Ugh. If God can do such amazing things through Peter, [sigh] there's hope for me.

Peter said to Him, "Lord... I don't think it's Jesus. Do you think it's Jes-... Yeah, I don't think it's... If it's You, tell me to come to You on the water!"

Peter, are you a flaming idiot? Peter, you can't walk on water in the bathtub! We're in the Sea of Galilee here, and the storms are higher than the sides of the ship! Peter, are you nuts?! Can you imagine what the other disciples are thinking? "Well, it was nice knowing ya!" I mean, they're afraid for their lives in the boat! Peter says, "Lord, if it's You, tell me to come."

I love Jesus' response to this. [speaks Russian] Sorry, you don't speak Russian. "Come. Let's do it. Come on, Peter. Peter, you have no clue how long I've been waiting for somebody to ask the truly, truly impossible from Me. Peter, let's do it. Come on."

So, of course, Peter doesn't engage his brain yet. And he hops over the side of the boat. Now, we all know that Peter started to sink and when he looked away from Jesus, down he goes. But we miss the simple fact that Peter – apart from Jesus Christ – is the only human being to walk on water. Peter did it! Because he had the guts – and maybe the lack of common sense – to believe Jesus at His word. You have to be careful. Peter asked for the impossible, but that's not what got him out of the boat. If you ask God for the impossible, don't jump out of the boat *assuming* that He has said, "Come." You wait for that response.

But when Jesus *invites* you to do the impossible, will you have the courage to get out of the boat? Peter walked on water. I love that! No one else. There were other people who raised the dead, other people who healed the deaf and the blind, other people who did all kinds of other amazing miracles, but *no one* apart from Jesus that we know of walked on water, except Peter. When Peter and I are in heaven, sitting over an espresso, I'm going to ask him about that. "So, what was it like?" By the way, there's going to be the *best* espresso in heaven. Mm. Or Earl Grey tea, whichever you choose.

Peter did it. He had the courage to respond to Jesus' invitation to truly do the spectacular. Wow. What a man. What a courage. What a putz. I mean... I mean, we think that. "Peter!" But he did! Can you imagine now what the other disciple are thinking? [frustrated exclamation] "Why didn't *I* say that?! That could've been *me!*" John is nudging James, "You see that?! I *told* you to not stop me!" Peter did it.

Sometimes, in the middle of a storm, we find our greatest opportunity. Peter never did anything like this ever again, but Peter walked on the water in the middle of a storm. The storm's not calmed yet, you notice that? When they got into the boat, scripture tells us, the winds died. The storm died. Peter is walking on the water towards Jesus, *on the storm*. Sometimes – not always, but sometimes – our greatest opportunities come in the middle of the worst storm we can imagine. When Jesus says, “Come on. Let’s do it. Let’s do it, Peter. Let’s do it, Levi. Let’s do it, Bill. Let’s do it. Let’s go for a walk together. We’ll let these guys figure out how to get back, and you and I will walk the rest of the way.” Sometimes, it’s in those moments of absolute despair, when we cry out to God, and He says, “Thank you! I’ve been waiting for you to ask that. Now, let’s do it.” Remember: always make sure of His response before you get out of the boat.

But it doesn’t end there, and we know that Peter’s fear took over. Peter’s brain did eventually engage, and Peter’s brain overtook his faith.

Seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”

(NASB)

And Jesus instantly reached out his hand and picked him up, and they continued back to the boat. What had changed for Peter? Had the circumstances changed? No. Had the wind changed? No. Had the waves changed? Had the time of day changed? Had anything changed with his situation, with his circumstance? No. What changed? Peter’s focus. He took his eyes off Jesus and put them on his circumstance. See, if we want to do the impossible, if we want to walk on water when Jesus invites us to, you’ve got to keep your eyes on *Him*. Because when we drop our eyes and see the storm that is still going on, we have a tendency to say, “Ah! Help! [in pained voice] I can’t do this!” And Jesus said, “You never could!” See, that’s the ironic thing! Peter’s walking on the water! This is cool! He can’t do that! And when he realized that, that was when he had the problem. As long as he realized that *Jesus* could do it, he was fine.

See, it’s not us, it’s not me, it’s not *my* faith; it wasn’t Peter’s faith that helped him walk on the water. What did Peter’s faith accomplish? It got him out of the boat. *Jesus* did the miracle. It happened because Jesus wanted it to. If Jesus had said, “Peter, don’t. Take a look around, Peter. Don’t get out.” What would have happened if Peter had gotten out? That, “Lord, save me,” would have come a whole lot quicker. Peter switched to fear instead of faith, like we talked about in the very, very first storm. “Why did you doubt? Why did you doubt, Peter? We were going to have such an amazing conversation, just the two of us, as we walked across the water. Why did you doubt, Peter?”

See, the opposite of faith is fear, and the opposite of fear is faith. And Peter let fear control him at that point in time. Of course, Jesus rescues them from the storm. “Peter, why did you doubt? We had such an amazing thing going.” But that’s okay. We’re human. And Jesus knows that. There was one preacher one time, old style preacher, praying at the end of the service. [dramatic voice] “Lord, You know we are but dust.” And there’s a little boy in the front row going, “Mommy, what’s butt dust?” Sorry, that comes to mind every time I think that we are “but dust.” Wait a minute. He remembers that we are dust. He knows our frailties. He knows His capabilities, but He knows our frailties. And He takes that into account. You notice He doesn’t call Peter an idiot? He doesn’t say, “Peter, you schmuck!”

“Oh, well. Why did you doubt, Peter? Let’s move on.” And he rescues the rest of the disciples. “We’d better join the other guys now. They’ve been jealous long enough. There’s a green glow coming out of the boat.” When they got into the boat the wind stopped, and those who were in the boat worshipped Him. “You certainly are God’s Son.” See, they’d witnessed three amazing miracles that day. Actually, if we count the feeding of the five thousand, they’d witnessed four. Jesus fed the five thousand, and then, Jesus walked on the water. And then, Jesus kept *Peter* up as *Peter* walked on the water! And then he calmed the storm in a heartbeat, and it was still. Quiet. Peaceful. [sigh] It’s been a long day.

It’s been a long week, hasn’t it? It’s been a long weekend here at WEB. Sometimes, we’re in a storm because that’s exactly where God wants us to be. Not because I did anything wrong, but because God has orchestrated something for me in that storm. In the middle of that storm, always, always know that you are *never* out of God’s sight or God’s ability to care. Whatever you feel – and our feelings are legitimate, okay? Feelings are real. We hurt, we grieve, we cry! We get angry! That’s okay. But in the midst of that, know that God is big enough to walk you through that. We have to interpret our circumstances by scripture, *not* the other way around. We don’t interpret scripture by our circumstances. “Look at what God has allowed to happen; therefore, God can’t be a God of love.” No, that’s wrong. God is a God of love. God is a God of comfort. We are told that over and over.

“I don’t understand what’s happened.” Yeah, that’s because you’re a created being, just like me. Simple fact is that God is God. He loves you, He cares about you, and if He has put you in a storm, it is for His reasons, and they are good. Because God *is* good. All the time. And all the time? --Congregation responds: “God is good.”-- Amen. Whether we feel it or not! That *is* the truth. And sometimes, in the middle of that storm [laugh], God has the most amazing opportunities.

When we were in Ukraine – I may have told you this before, I don’t know – I spent a week to 10 days in the hospital after being beat up and mugged on the side of the road. I was beat up, left unconscious, and spent a week in hospital recovering. Fractured my skull, and mashed my face and stuff. The good news through all of that is that I *do* have doctors’ written proof that my brain does function normally. Just in case you were wondering.

That was one of the lowest times in my life, physically, ever. But you know, it was one of the sweetest times, spiritually, as God and I were able to interact in that hospital room with people around me who spoke the language that I kind of understood a little bit. We hadn't even been there two years, so our Russian... [speaks Russian] ...wasn't quite so good. And God would bring people to visit me, and it was so cool to be able to share with them God's grace. To be able to reach out and tell them about God's forgiveness that He had allowed me to do for the guys who had beaten me up. Not, "Yay, me," but, "Yay, God!" Because in the middle of the storm, God does the miracles.

I don't know – well, I guess I do – you guys *are* in a bit of a storm, aren't you? And we grieve her loss. I loved coming here and spending time with her at the end of the services. But you know what? She's dancing in heaven today. She is doing everything today that she couldn't do Thursday. Everything. We had a situation like that in our church in November. Diabetes so bad he had lost both his legs. You watched him walk and you were just afraid he was going to topple over somewhere, until you realize he is walking on two prosthetic legs. It's just amazing. Throat cancer. And he passed into glory singing and praising God.

We grieve, yes. We hurt, yes. You may be in other storms, as well. Loss of a job, looking for work, family tragedies, I don't know. I don't know what your personal storm is today, but I *do* know my God. I know my Jesus, and I know that He knows exactly where you're at. He has never lost sight of you. He is able to rescue you in a heartbeat, when the time is right. Maybe you're running, and God is trying to get your attention, but maybe he's saying, "Do you have the courage to ask Me? Go ahead. Ask. Because I want to do great and wonderful things that you haven't even begun to consider yet." Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, You are amazing. You walked with Peter on the water. You did the impossible so often and yet, you touched hearts and lives and that was the real miracle. It's the change that You work in our lives. Father, as we continue to engage with You through this coming week, Father, if we are in a storm, I ask that You would bring clarity as to why we're maybe in that storm. Father, I ask that You would encourage our hearts to know that You are with us, no matter why we're in this storm, and that You have a purpose for us and that we are never outside of Your love or Your care or Your attention as Your children. Thank you, Lord Jesus. Father, thank you for taking Marjorie Home. For healing her in ways that could never happen here. Jesus, we love You, and we just want that to show today. In Jesus' name, amen.