

**Sermon Series Four: Believe and Live**  
**(The Gospel of John: Signs of the Messiah - 1:1-12:50)**  
**John 6:16-21**  
***When the Storms Strike***

*<sup>16</sup> When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, <sup>17</sup> got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. <sup>18</sup> The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. <sup>19</sup> When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were frightened. <sup>20</sup> But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." <sup>21</sup> Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.*

What do you do when the storms come? What do you do: when that baby you have been so excited about is stillborn; when you hear the doctor utter that dreaded "C-word"; when you discover that the child killed in the school shooting is your child; when your best friend comes back disfigured from a war; when the value of your stocks is cut in half; when you are in a life threatening situation? What do you do when the storms come? Well as we come to our passage a storm has struck the disciples once again on the Sea of Galilee. And strikingly this storm has come up immediately after Christ had "*made his disciples get into the boat and go before him (ahead of him) to the other side*" of the lake while "*he went up on the mountain to pray*" (Mark 6: 45, 46). It is late afternoon or early evening and darkness is about to set in as they get into the boat. They will now attempt to row the six or seven miles back to Capernaum on the northwest side of the lake. But after rowing about three or four miles, suddenly a violent storm comes up. Mark tells us that the disciples are straining at the oars in the middle of the lake and are getting nowhere. (Mark 6:48) They began at dusk and have been rowing for hours. It is now approximately 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning and maybe even almost dawn. Now what you need to know is that the Sea of Galilee lies about 600 feet below sea level and often cool air from the southeastern elevated plateaus suddenly comes rushing in to displace

the warm moist air over the lake. It will churn up the water into a violent squall - a “boiling cauldron.” Even today, powerboats must remain docked as the winds pound the water. You can imagine then these violent storms would’ve wreaked havoc on the small wooden boats used in Jesus time (These fishing boats were approximately 26 feet long and 8 feet wide and could hold about 15 people including four rowers and a helmsman.). Indeed, it was not uncommon for fishermen to lose their lives in such a situation. What were the disciples to do in the midst of the storm? But before we go on, I would like to remind you that their storm was both an emotional and physical storm. They had just seen the people recognize Christ’s royal, messianic person and yet Jesus had flat out refused the offer to be king. The twelve must have been wondering: *Have we been mistaken? Have we put our faith in the wrong person?* And now on top of all that, they are in a fight for their own lives. But what we will find is that the answer to their situation is quite simple. They need to trust! They need to put their full faith and confidence in the person of Christ. And as they do, they will find, as you will find:

### **I. Christ Sees Me in the Midst of My Trying Situation.**

Mark 6:47 and 48 says, “*And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and Jesus was alone on the land. And he saw that they were making headway painfully for the wind was against them.*” Jesus was watching and totally tuned in to their situation just as he is watching and is totally absorbed with your particular stormy situation. He knew and knows what we are going through. He also knows that he cannot make things too easy for any of us because our spiritual muscles must not be allowed to grow flabby. We must row in rough weather sometimes. But even when times are tough, we can be sure that Jesus’s eye is upon us. God not only does what is best for his children. He loves us; he suffers with us. He shares our pain with us. Theologians call this presence of God *immanence*. God is always nearby. He is wherever you and I may be at any moment and in any place. Jeremiah 23:23-24 says, “*Am I not a God at hand, declares the Lord, and not a God far away? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him, declares the Lord? Do I not fill heaven and earth declares the Lord.*” **Children lined up in**

the cafeteria of a religious school for lunch. At the head of the table was a large pile of apples. The teacher made a note: "Take only one, God is watching." At the other end of the table was a large pile of chocolate chip cookies. A boy wrote a note: "Take all you want, God is watching the apples."

\*\*\* In the wake of the 2013 NSA data spying controversy, The Wall Street Journal ran an article titled "Phones Leave a Telltale Trail." The authors note that everyone who owns a cell phone creates "metadata" that leaves a "digital trail." While each individual crumb of data might seem insignificant, when it's combined and analyzed, it provides "one of the most powerful investigative tools ever devised." By tracing our metadata, investigators can pinpoint where we were or where we are at this moment.

Now if the government can do that, then how much more does God know exactly where you are, where you've been, and what you've been doing and suffering.

## **II. Christ Uses My Trying Situation.**

The Bible speaks of a number of reasons for trials including **1)** that they are simply common to humanity due to the corruption of the world through sin (Job 5:7). **2)** That we sometimes bring them upon ourselves. God allows these consequences to discipline, train and correct us (Jonah; Hebrews 12:5, 6, 10-11). **3)** Some come to mature and grow us (James 1:2-4). **4)** They can also be used as a tool to evangelize the lost (Acts 16:25-34). **5)** Further trials may come to bring glory to God or to reveal something about God. (That is the case here.). Why was it *that Jesus had not yet come to them (6:17)*? I am quite certain that part of the reason Jesus went up on the mountain was to pray for his disciples as they went through this experience. He will use this situation to demonstrate something about himself. Is it not true that when we are in a very difficult situation, as Christians, we have almost a knee-jerk reaction to look up, to cry out to God - to ask others to petition God for us. Further, it is these trying times that often draw us near to God and

help us discover something new about him. Warren Wiersbe writes, “There are two kinds of storms: storms of correction, when God disciplines us; and storms of perfection, when God helps us to grow.” Jesus is using the storm to teach his disciples some lessons:

**1. To demonstrate his deity.** Can you imagine being in a life-threatening storm, soaked to the bone, exhausted, and then seeing what looks like to be an apparition, a ghost or evil spirit coming towards you. You would be terrified! But then they hear those comforting words “*It is I; do not be afraid.*” It is interesting that the Greek words *ego eimi* can be translated “It is I” or they can be translated “I am.” The latter is a name for God in the Old Testament and is also a way that Jesus will describe himself elsewhere in John. Certainly his deity is implied here by his walking on the water. They would remember how he had calmed the storm earlier (Mark 4:35-41; 6:45-52) demonstrating his awesome power over nature. Perhaps their minds were even drawn for a moment to the Old Testament Scriptures that spoke of God walking on or through the sea (Job 9:8; Psalm 77:19; Isaiah 43:16; cf. Psalm 18:16; 144:7). In the storm Christ wants to remind you that He is God: he is all-powerful, all wise, all loving, all sovereign, all knowing...nothing is to hard for him! **Several years ago in Britain, researchers went door-to-door asking persons about their belief in God. One of their questions: "Do you believe in a God who intervenes in human history, who changes the course of affairs, who performs miracles, etc.?" When published, their study took its title from the response of one man who was seen as rather typical of those who responded. He answered, "No, I don't believe in that God; I believe in the ordinary God." In our trials Jesus will demonstrate that he is much more than "just the ordinary God"**

**2. To demonstrate that he is with you in and through the storm.** We all need someone to be with us in the storm. Not someone with all the answers, but someone who will just be there! **Rick and Kay Warren's son Matthew committed suicide at the age of 27 after a long struggle with mental illness. About a year after his death, Kay Warren posted the following advice on her Facebook page: The truest friends and "helpers" are those who wait for the griever to emerge from the darkness that**

swallowed them alive without growing afraid, anxious or impatient. They don't pressure their friend to be the old familiar person they're used to; they're willing to accept that things are different, embrace the now-scarred one they love, and are confident that their compassionate, non-demanding presence is the surest expression of God's mercy to their suffering friend. They're ok with messy and slow and few answers ... and they never say "Move on." Jesus sees us and watches us in our trials, but he does not watch with some kind of serene, unmoved detachment. He watches us in order to help. And he does so particularly when life becomes so burdensome for us and when spiritual victory seems well beyond our grasp. God himself was with them in the storm! God himself walks us through and out of the storm. The text says that when Jesus climbed into the boat *immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going*. Some storms we go through may be long and tedious but God is there before the storm, during the storm, and will be there at the end of the storm. It may even be possible that Jesus performed a second miracle here - that he followed walking on the water by a miraculous landing!

**3. To demonstrate that he will reward our leaps of faith during the trial.** Courage comes from knowing that Jesus is present in the trial. Although John doesn't mention it, Matthew records the story of Peter walking on the water as part of this event (Matthew 14:22-33). "*Lord, if it is you, Peter answered, command me to come to you on the water.*" Even though the disciples had seen Jesus perform miracles before, it seems almost incredible that Peter would have believed that he could walk on water. But with remarkable trust, Peter climbed over the side of the boat and began to walk. Christ rewarded his gigantic step of faith. In every trial there will come that moment of opportunity, that moment to step out by faith, to trust. And when we do a blessing lies on the other side. Faith honors God and God honors faith! A story from the life of missionaries Robert and Mary Moffat illustrates this truth. For 10 years this couple labored faithfully in Bechuanaland (now called Botswana) without one ray of encouragement to brighten their way. They could not report a single convert. Finally the directors of their mission board began to question the wisdom of continuing the work. The thought of leaving their post, however, brought great

grief to this devoted couple, for they felt sure that God was in their labors, and that they would see people turn to Christ in due season. They stayed; and for a year or two longer, darkness reigned. Then one day a friend in England sent word to the Moffats that she wanted to mail them a gift and asked what they would like. Trusting that in time the Lord would bless their work, Mrs. Moffat replied, "Send us a communion set; I am sure it will soon be needed." God honored that dear woman's faith. The Holy Spirit moved upon the hearts of the villagers, and soon a little group of six converts was united to form the first Christian church in that land. The communion set from England was delayed in the mail; but on the very day before the first commemoration of the Lord's supper in Bechuanaland, the set arrived.

**4. To demonstrate that it is not the quantity of our faith but the object of our faith that gets us through the trial and allows us to do the impossible.** He was doing well until he took his eyes off of Jesus and focused on the circumstances around him. When I go through trials I focus on Christ and a future that will never end where there will be no more trials. It helps me to understand that the length and severity of the trial is minuscule in comparison to the length and glory of the world to come. And that world is the very world that Jesus is preparing for me.

**5. To bring us to the joy of worship.** The stilling of the storm is not the climax of the story. The worship of Jesus is! Matthew 14:33 says, "*And those in the boat worshiped him saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'*" This is the first time that the disciples address Jesus with his full title: "God's Son" or "the Son of God." As Constable writes, "This was a new high for the disciples in their appreciation of Jesus' person." F. F. Bruce adds, "Retrospectively, the disciples, in making this confession, are giving answer to the earlier question they had raised in an equally perilous situation at sea: 'What sort of man is this, that even wind and sea obey him?'" When we come through the trial we can look back and begin to see how God was present with us sometimes walking with us and sometimes carrying us through the trial.

### **Conclusion**

As the story ends, we are able to see that Jesus will bring you home. He will get you to where you are going. He will get you to the place where he has called you or to the place to which you have been sent. If he has called you to be a pastor or a missionary he will see that you become one

whatever the difficulties. If he is called you to live a life of witness in a drab undesirable spot, he will give you strength to make your witness there. He will help you in the shop, the home, the business, the farm, the hospital, the factory, the school, the marketplace or wherever you may be. And best of all he will see you safely through this life to your final home in heaven. Presently we live in the dark night, in the stormy sea of a world gone haywire. It seems that every day the newsbreaks bring us stories of jets crashing, beheadings, cops being killed, countries being invaded, terrorists terrorizing in ways thought unimaginable... This Christmas Iranian police stormed a small house church and put its members in jail... in India Christians cried out to the police for help as Hindu radicals tried to force them to convert to Hinduism. In America there are children being prohibited from writing Merry Christmas to the soldiers, senior citizens being banned from praying over their meals in the Senior Center, the VA banning the mention of God in military funerals, numerous attempts to have Veterans memorials torn down if they have any religious symbols such as a cross. But as the storms rage around us Christ sees us in the storm and he will use the trial to do something, to make something beautiful of our lives in this world and in the next.