

Sermon – 26/06/2011 am

Jesus Stops the Storm

Study Text: Luke 8:22-25

I was glad to hear that cyclone Yasi was not my fault. Since I breathe out around 1kg of carbon dioxide each day I thought I might be making the climate change and hence making cyclones more frequent and intense. But the experts said the cyclone was not because of climate change but a normal *La Nina* weather event.

On the other hand a storm that hit the Mediterranean Sea hundreds of years ago was caused by a man – a man called Jonah. The storm was sent by God to stop Jonah from disobeying God. On the other hand the storm that hit the house of one of Job's sons killing everyone inside was the work of Satan. Satan challenged God to allow Job's faith to be tested. The outcome was a foreign invasion, a fire from heaven, and a great wind.

Is it any wonder the experts are finding the climate very complex? The experts are mere men and women after all. Are they factoring into their calculations Jonah's experience and Job's experience? Are they factoring in the power of Jesus Christ of Nazareth that we read of in this passage from the Bible?

Luke, the writer of this gospel, was a man of science. He was a man who carefully studied the life of Jesus from eyewitness accounts. We cannot dismiss what he writes as easily as some think. The Creator God has set in place laws that we call the laws of nature. These laws govern our climate and everything else in the universe. How thankful we are for these laws. But we see here that the God who made these laws can override them if and when he so chooses.

1. Sleep

One day Jesus got into a boat with his disciples and said 'let us cross over to the other side of the lake' (8:22). It was on the evening of the day that he told the parable of the sower, according to Mark's gospel (Mark 4:35). As they set out rowing or sailing across the lake of Galilee Jesus fell asleep.

The lake of Galilee is about 21 km long and 11 km wide, a sizeable body of water. It is also at a low altitude – 200 m below sea level. It is surrounded by hills which are quite high on the northern and eastern sides. Valleys or ravines in these hills funnel the wind so that it whips up large waves on the lake. A friend of mine was stationed in Galilee as a United Nations peace keeper. He told me how quickly these gale force winds would come on the lake.

Jesus fell asleep. He must have been weary from his ministry. Jesus was weary and he slept just as we do. Is that comforting to know? If you get weary in doing God's work then know that Jesus understands. That is, weary in doing God's work not weary of doing God's work as J C Ryle reminds us. Paul writes *let us not become weary in doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart* (Galatians 6:9).

2. Storm

The boat Jesus was in probably belonged to one of his disciples. A number of them were fishermen. They were seasoned sailors who knew the lake well. They knew about sudden storms on the lake, but this one must have been particularly violent. The waves were crashing over the boat and it was

filling with water. They were in grave danger. They rushed to wake Jesus who amazingly was still asleep. ‘Master, master we are perishing’ they said (8:23, 24).

The disciples had given up hope of saving themselves. They were experienced and strong fishermen but the storm was too powerful for them. They feared they would drown. They went to Jesus with this bad news. They had seen Jesus heal lots of sick people, cast out demons and even raise a dead man. They had heard him say ‘your sins are forgiven’, knowing that only God can forgive sins. They had left everything to follow Jesus. But when they came to Jesus they were filled with fear. ‘Where is your faith?’ Jesus asked when they woke him up (8:25).

How would you have responded to the storm if you had been in the boat that day? ‘That is a hypothetical question’ you say. But you must have faced similar dangers in your life. Maybe you are facing a grave danger today – a life threatening disease, attack from enemies, or some other crisis. Are you living in fear or in faith?

It is natural to fear. Psychologists talk about the fight or flight response when we fear something. The disciples were fighting against the storm but were being overpowered. They could not flee the situation. They became desperate. In their desperation they went to Jesus. This was the wise thing to do.

It is natural to fear but is it necessary? Is it the way we should respond as those who believe in Jesus? The disciples had Jesus in the boat with them. They were in the presence of the Son of God, the One who was with God in the beginning, the One through whom all things were made and in whom all things hold together (Colossians 1:16, 17). Did they really trust in Jesus? Did they really believe that with God all things are possible?

If Jesus rebuked his disciples saying ‘where is your faith’, will he not rebuke you when you begin to fear? Nothing can happen to you outside the will of God. *Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord* (Romans 8:39). These are not just words that we read. They are promises that we take hold of, promises that affect how we live. Are you walking in fear or in faith? Do you have faith in Jesus Christ who stilled the mighty storm on the lake of Galilee?

I am reminded of a book by Martyn Lloyd Jones called ‘From fear to faith’. It is a small book of just seventy pages. It is a study of the book of Habakkuk. Habakkuk was a prophet who said ‘the just shall live by faith’ (Habakkuk 2:4). The name Habakkuk means ‘one who clings’. He clung to the Lord saying ‘yet will I rejoice in the Lord’ even as his nation was destroyed and the people carried off into exile.

3. Stilling the storm

The disciples woke Jesus to tell him they were about to drown. How he could sleep during such a disaster was amazing; and it was disturbing to the disciples. ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing’ they said (Mark 4:38). Did they expect Jesus to do anything apart from help them with the rowing? Matthew records them as saying ‘Lord save us’ but just how they expected him to save them is not clear (Matthew 8:25). They were not expecting Jesus to do what he did, that is for sure.

Jesus got up and rebuked the wind and the raging water (8:24). What an amazing thing to do? None of them had thought to do this! Do you think the wind would have stopped if they did? Did they have the power to stop the wind? No. But God does.

*The heavens are yours,
The earth also is yours,
The world and all its fullness,*

You have founded them (Psalm 89:11).

God created the heavens and the earth. God is omnipotent or all powerful. He has power over the wind and the waves. He has power over demons and the devil. He has power over kings and rulers. He has power over men and their machines.

When Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves they immediately stopped. There was complete calm on the lake (8:24). This was not the storm blowing itself out. These were experienced fishermen. They marvelled at what happened saying '*who can this be?*' *He commands even the wind and the waves and they obey him!* (8:25).

The word 'rebuke' is interesting in this context. It is found in all the gospel accounts. Leon Morris writes 'this is a somewhat surprising verb and may imply that there was an evil force behind the storm'. Another commentator writes 'by rebuking the wind and the waves he actually rebuked the powers of Satan which at that moment were active in the elements'. Was Satan actually trying to drown Jesus while he was asleep?

Satan was behind the storm that killed Job's children. He did this to test Job, the servant of God. But God is powerful to save from all Satan's attacks. He is all powerful.

*God is ready to help in time of trouble.
Therefore we will not fear,
Even though the earth be removed,
And the mountains fall into the middle of the sea;
Though its waters roar and be troubled (Psalm 46:1-3).*

4. Salvation

When Moses came to the Red Sea he stretched out his hand and rebuked the sea and it dried up (Psalm 106:9). They saw God's great salvation. When the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant stepped into the flooded Jordan River it stopped flowing and the people crossed over on dry ground. Paul says that the Israelites drank of the spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ (I Corinthians 10:4).

Jesus Christ saved his disciples from the dangerous storm that hit as they were crossing the lake. He is powerful to save you from the storm also. He is powerful to bring you through whatever crisis hits you in your life. He is powerful to save you from the attacks of Satan. Satan is out to destroy you. Be on your guard and remember that Jesus is in the boat with you. Call to him and he will save you.

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