

Why and What In A Storm

I looked back at a message I preached two years ago today (Oct. 11) and it was called Faith in the Storm. There must be something about this time of year... One more sermon on storms.

Last Sunday Sarah referred to the storm the apostle Paul and his associates encountered. The story is found in the last two chapters of the book of Acts. I want to revisit that story and share some lessons we can learn from this storm. As Sarah mentioned, Paul, a Roman citizen, is a prisoner being escorted to Rome to stand trial before Caesar. Luke is with him and is giving us a first person account. Permit me to quickly read Luke's account in Acts 27.

When storms come into our lives, literally or figuratively, often the first question we ask is why? Why did this happen to me or to someone I love? It is a question that can't always be adequately answered. There may be layers of reasons for some of the storms we encounter. It may have to do with our decisions and their resulting consequences; it may involve a spiritual attack to defeat or destroy us; it may just be life.

I came across something the late James Montgomery Boice had written concerning reasons for suffering that I think we can adapt to the question of why storms come. There are first, **Common Storms**. Storms are simply part of life. Things happen because we're human. Job couldn't understand why all the storms hit him but he acknowledged, "**Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.**" **Job 5:7**. Trouble and storms are part of life. Why did Paul experience this storm in his life? Because in that part of the world, at that time of year (v9), there were storms. It was just life. Some of us as we age wonder why we can't do what we used to do. Why are we having health problems after we ate all that health food and vitamins for years? It's because bodies wear out. It's common to human beings. Common storms.

Were there other reasons for Paul's storm? Sure. Paul and his fellow passengers could have avoided their storm. It was going to come, it was inevitable, but they didn't have to be in it. Paul had spent much more time on the sea than the Roman Centurion. He warned them of the danger but they ignored his warning. Being in the storm was a result of a poor decision, but the storm came because it was naturally a stormy season. It was a part of life

Corrective storms. I think it's fair to say some storms come in our lives in order to correct our course. Am I saying that God may allow something painful in your life in order to get you back where you need to be, in relationship with him? Yes! I'm confident he loves me that

much. He lets natural consequences happen to wake us up. He may allow a storm to come our way in order to spare our life, to keep us from hell. The bible says, **“Do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline: God is treating you as sons...No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on...it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” Hebrews 12:5-11** Why do storms come? To correct us, to save us, to get us back on course, to train us. They may come as discipline because he loves us. We have to choose to respond appropriately to the storms we encounter! A storm can correct your course.

Constructive storms. Similar to corrective storms, storms can prove to be character building. James says, **“Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” James 1:2-4**

Character and perseverance, hope and understanding, experience and maturity result if we bear up under the storms and keep trusting God. We are better for having gone through the storm. Storms can be constructive for us.

Christ-glorifying storms. Remember the man born blind in John 9? The disciples asked who sinned to cause that man’s blindness, him or his parents. Jesus said, **“Neither, but this happened so the work of God might be displayed in his life.” John 9:3** It may be that some storms are allowed to come into our life so Jesus can be glorified, so others can see His work in our life, to see our trust and His deliverance and His victory. Does that seem fair? Maybe not in the light of this moment or this life, but in the light of eternity and in the great and faithful plan and purpose of God, yes. He causes even the storms to work for our good and for his glory.

Cosmic storms. There are storms that come seemingly without reason or explanation. Why would God allow this to happen? At some level what I believe, what I see, is a scene similar to the one in the opening chapters of the book of Job. God and all of heaven and all the forces of hell step back in wonder and awe and watch a faithful child of God going through a storm, yet declaring, “I still trust you, even in the storm.” Like Job said, “Though God slay me, yet I will trust him.” The cosmos, all of heaven rejoices and all of hell trembles at the faith of God’s people on display, the people redeemed by his grace.

Storms will come. All kinds. Jesus spoke of trouble that would come at the end of the age – wars and rumours of wars, earthquakes, nation against nation, storms of all kinds, and Jesus said, **“See to it that you are not alarmed.” Matthew 24:6** Storms are going to come, but don’t be alarmed. The storms don’t have to defeat or destroy you.

I’ve given you some possible reasons why storms come. But as I often say, the question is not so much why, but what? What do we know that will help us through the storm? Let me suggest some things Paul knew that saw him through his storm.

Paul knew God was with him, even in a storm. Paul told the other 275 people on board that he knew God was with him. Paul said, **“Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, ‘Do not be afraid Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’” Acts 27:23-24**

The angel of the Lord had stood beside him. But even if there hadn’t been this heavenly messenger standing beside him, Paul knew that Jesus had said to his disciples, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:20. Jesus had promised to never leave us nor forsake us. Paul knew God was with him, even in the storm.

The enemy will do his best to convince you God has abandoned you, that’s why you are in the storm. He will try to separate you from God’s presence, God’s concern, His care. Paul himself tells us, **“If God is for us, who can be against us? ...For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8: 31, 37-39.** If you are going through a storm today, remember Jesus is with you. All we’ve talked about these past few weeks, it’s true. He won’t leave you in the storm! He is beside you, just as he was with Paul, even in the storm and nothing will separate you from his love! Are you aware of his presence?

Paul knew he belonged to God, even in a storm. Paul said, “the angel of the God whose I am...” Paul is talking about possession here. I am his. Paul knew he was not his own, he had been bought at a price. He had been purchased by the blood of Jesus and he belonged to the Lord. Do you hear me? You belong to Jesus because he bought you with his blood, his very life. That’s how valuable you are to him. He is not going to leave you out in the storm to be destroyed.

Think about it. How do you belong to the Lord? **You are his creation.** He uniquely created you with a purpose in mind. Paul says **“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10** You belong to the Lord as his creation. He isn’t going to abandon you in the storm.

You are his child. He is your father in heaven. As earthly fathers and parents, even with all of our weakness and faults, we wouldn’t leave our child out in a storm by themselves. We would do whatever necessary to look after our child and care for them. You are his child. John declares, **“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” 1 John 3:1** Paul knows, although the storm is ravaging that boat, although everyone on board is giving up hope, Paul knows he is a child of God and God isn’t going to abandon his children. If you are in a storm today, be encouraged. You are a child of God. You belong to him. He won’t abandon you!

You are his bride. The bible refers to the church as the bride of Christ and Paul compares the relationship between a husband and wife to the relationship between Christ and his church. We belong to Jesus the way a bride and groom belong to each other! The two become one flesh. Nothing is going to tear us away from our heavenly bridegroom, not even the hurricane winds of a storm.

You are his sheep. The bible speaks of Jesus as being the good shepherd who knows his sheep and the sheep know his voice. He is the good shepherd who leaves the 99 to go looking for the one lost lamb. That’s how devoted he is to the sheep of his pasture. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Even if we go through a storm or walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we have no reason to fear because the Lord is with us! He is our good shepherd, even in a storm.

When Paul says the God whose I am, he knew what it meant to belong to the Lord. Do you? If you belong to him, even in a storm, you have no cause for fear.

Paul knew he was in the service of the Lord, even in a storm. “The God whose I am and whom I serve...” Paul was in the service of the Lord and that didn’t stop because a storm came along. That didn’t stop because he was mistreated or threatened or beaten or shipwrecked. He didn’t stop serving the Lord when life proved unfair or when friends betrayed him or colleagues abandoned him. Whether circumstances were favorable or not, Paul was determined to serve the Lord.

We've already established that storms are going to come, for any variety of reasons, the question is, are you going to recognize that you belong to the Lord, even in a storm, and have you decided that you will continue to serve him, even in a storm? His calling didn't change, did it? If you have truly surrendered your heart and life to the Lord, then if he wants you to serve him on a boat in a storm or if he chooses to have you serve him under a cloudless sky, that is up to the Lord. Your calling is to trust and obey! "Lord, take me and use me, wherever, even in a storm." You're his workmanship, created with purpose. Serve God, wherever he needs you, wherever he places you. God needed a witness, a leader, a servant on that ship and so he placed Paul there. Still serving, even in a storm.

Paul knew he could trust God, even in a storm. Once again, the trustworthiness of God didn't change because of the weather or the wreck of the ship. Paul warned the people on board, "nevertheless, we must run aground on some island." "There is going to be a shipwreck, but God has promised me we will all be saved if you will stay on board the ship. Stay with me because I know I can trust the Lord who spoke to me, even in a storm." Paul told them, **"I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me."** Acts 27:25

Is there something that God has spoken to you, you know you heard from God, but you haven't seen it happen yet? Instead you are in a storm. Paul said in verse 20, "neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging." That doesn't just mean it was dark, that means they had no idea where they were because they navigated by the sun and the stars. Maybe you feel as lost in your storm as Paul and his shipmates did in theirs. But you can know the same thing Paul knew. God is with you, even in the storm. You belong to Him, even in a storm. You can serve him, even in a storm. And you can trust him, even in a storm! Don't stop believing. Have faith that it will happen just as he told you, just as he promised. If you will trust and obey God, He will see you through your storm.

Paul trusted God and was willing to be used of God even in a storm. The outcome? Everyone on board was saved just as God had promised and just as Paul said. The father of the chief official of the island was healed as were others and the gospel preached for three months while they were there. If you are willing to serve God and trust him, if you are willing to stay with the ship and obey God and his promises, you will be amazed at what God can and will do.

"After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island." Acts 28:11. Look at this. Fourteen days they spent in a storm. Two weeks of being battered in

the wind and waves, unable to see where they were going, unable to eat or sleep. Then shipwrecked on Malta. Then spending three months delayed on that island. “We aren’t on schedule. Things aren’t happening the way we planned. This isn’t how I thought it would be.” Yes, but God is still faithful. It’s not what you expected, but Jesus is still with you. Yes, the timing is not what you expected, but God’s timing is always right, always best. Three months late? No, right on time. Not the ministry you expected. No, but still opportunity for you to minister and serve God, just not where you thought it would be, just not how you planned or not where you planned. But Malta needed the gospel. Who knows what affect all of this had on the other 275 passengers on board that ship as well.

Are you willing to commit your life, your journey, to the Lord and trust him, even in the storm? You see, he is at work in ways you can’t see. Trust him. Let him take the helm. Let him direct your journey. Trust him with the timing. Remember, he is with you, you belong to him, keep serving him even in the storm. He’s counting on you!