



## STORM BREAKER

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Ken and Yvonne Whitty are a brother and sister who grew up in Manchester, England. Their parents died while they were still young, and the two were raised by family friends. But through a series of circumstances, when they grew up, they completely lost touch as adults. They had made attempts to track one another down over the years, but with no success. They didn't even know if the other person was still alive.

Until last year. Ken was going to be turning 65, and he felt he just needed to find his younger sister one way or another. He wanted to know where she was and how she was doing. He decided to start by putting an ad in the local paper to see if anybody knew what had happened to her. Right away, he got a phone call, and it was Yvonne herself. After 40 years of being separated, brother and sister were amazingly back together. But what was really incredible was that for the past 6 years, they had been only about 300 yards away from each other, living in the same neighborhood. They just hadn't made the connection. Ken had walked past Yvonne's house countless times. He would see her out working in her garden and never think anything of it. She was a totally familiar sight to him as a neighbor, but he had no idea who she was.

Sometimes, the more familiar we are with something the more difficult it can be to see it for what it is. We're very neighborly with the story we're going to talk about today. We've walked past it dozens of times. I've preached on it. The kids have talked about it in Sunday School. Many people here would call it one of their favorite Bible stories. But it's so comforting and comfortable that we it's easy to look past it and not really appreciate it fully.

We're continuing our study of the book of Matthew, seeing how Jesus impacted the lives of those he encountered. We've examined some of his healings. Last week we saw how on-target his words are. This morning we're headed out to sea to watch Jesus and his disciples as he interacts with nature.

We're picking up right where we left off last Sunday. Jesus had announced that he wanted to go to the other side of the lake, the Sea of Galilee.

**Matthew 8:23-27**

*Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"*

*He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.*

*The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"*

It's easy to see why this story is so popular. The storm is such a great metaphor for all the hardships we go through in life, and knowing Jesus is there beside us, knowing he can speak to our needs is a huge comfort.

We know and love this story. So when the disciples are all afraid and then caught off guard by what Jesus does, we tend to smile a patronizing little smile and shake our heads. "It's Jesus, you silly people. Of course he came through for you. When will you learn?"

Stanley Hauerwas wrote these words: "We know, of course, what sort of man this is because we know how the story will end. We, therefore, are tempted to assume a position of superiority to that of the disciples. But that is a form of pride we must learn to discipline."

That's a good word. All too often, I can find myself feeling critical of those first disciples, as if I would have known better. I can get all smug about having a better grasp of Jesus than they did.

But all I need to do is step away from their storm for a minute and think about going through one of my own "storms." And if I'm honest, I'll have to admit that I still have deep fears in those moments. I still have anxiety when I'm going through a crisis. As much as I may think I know better, I'm not so different from those first followers of Jesus. And if I'm going to get the full impact of what happened that day on the lake, I need to climb into the boat next to them and see things from their perspective – not as some wiser, more sophisticated Christian, but as someone who's right there in the thick of things, experiencing life with Jesus.

So what I'd like to try to do today is roll back some of the layers and layers of filters we bring to this story, forget our history with it and try to come at it with the fresh eyes of a disciple right there in the boat, taking it all in. Not that we can ever fully do that, but I think it's worth a try.

Back in 1986, a drought in Galilee exposed new areas of beach that are normally deep under water. Two fishermen noticed something in the sand and went to investigate. It turned out to be the remains of a boat dating clear back to the time of Jesus. There is nothing to tie it directly to him or any of his disciples, but it gives us a good idea of the

type of boat Jesus would have stepped into that day. It is 27 feet long and 7 feet wide, big enough to hold up to 15 men. It's the type of boat that could have been used for both fishing and transportation. Archaeologists can tell there were dozens of repairs made to the boat and that it was in use for decades, so it quite easily could have been out on the lake that same night.

They reconstructed the full boat, based on the hull, and you can see the sort of space where Jesus could have stretched out to take a nap. You can begin to see how vulnerable they would be out in rough waters.

But that's getting ahead of ourselves. At the start of the trip, everything was fine. Jesus was ready to head to the other side of the lake, away from the crowds. Matthew writes, "Then he got into the boat and the disciples followed him."

So far, Matthew has only introduced us to four of those disciples by name: Peter, Andrew, James and John. And all four of them were fishermen. They spent countless hours on boats. It was their world, their workplace. So Jesus is quite literally stepping into their environment. In recent days, they had been pulled away from their trade to follow Christ. Now Jesus is taking them back into their territory, redefining what that space means for them.

### **When is a boat not a boat?**

Now a boat isn't just an income – it's a vessel for carrying the Lord.

Christ transforms ordinary places into sanctuaries for him. You know, people talk sometimes about how astonishing it was that Jesus chose simple fisherman to be his first disciples instead of religious leaders, and it is a pretty revolutionary approach. But it's also extremely practical. Boats played a huge part in Jesus' ministry and are mentioned more than 50 times in the gospels. He was always travelling in them or speaking from them. So think about it: if your work is going to take you out to sea, who do you want with you – a bookish holy man who has the rules memorized, or the guy who smells like fish and is more at home on the water than in a church? If God wants to do his work out in the real world, reaching real people with real problems, who do you think he's going to use to get it done?

Jesus is still working through the most practical people and transforming their way of understanding their place in the world. Daryl Miller is a janitor in an Olympia hospital, where he's been on staff for 22 years. He originally set out to become a pastor, but life took a different turn and he ended up going back to janitorial work to pay the bills. One day as he was working he stopped in to see a patient who was a retired pastor. Daryl mentioned how discouraged he felt about not being in the ministry himself. The old pastor looked at him and said, "But you are in the ministry!" And when he said that, something clicked for Daryl.

Suddenly, he saw his job as something very different from what he had seen before. Now it wasn't just cleaning a building – it was a vessel for carrying Christ into the lives of all kinds of people. Nobody else had the opportunity for the wide range of interactions he had in the course of a day. He found out who the other believers were in the hospital and asked them to join an informal prayer chain. Now, as he works his way through the hospital during the day, he looks for prayer needs of staff and patients to pass along. He says, “My work puts me in contact with many people, and that’s where the momentum of this ministry lies. God has placed me where I can talk to others, learn their needs and ask, ‘Would you like us to pray?’”

Or I think about Jayson Smeder, our poker winner last week, who works at a pawn shop in Burien. Once a week, we turn that pawn shop into a sanctuary as we meet for an hour to study the Bible and pray. He’s got Christian music playing on the radio, and the whole time, customers are coming in and out – customers who are often in pretty desperate situations. I think there’s more going on there than meets the eye. I think Jesus has stepped into the boat and is saying, “Let’s take this thing somewhere.”

What’s your boat? When Jesus steps into it, he transforms it. Your job, your world, your life becomes a vessel for carrying Christ to new places. And that’s exciting to see.

It’s about an 8 mile trip across the Sea of Galilee, which is a significant amount of rowing. The disciples and Jesus must have been well into the voyage when the weather suddenly changed. There was no chance of hurrying back to shore – they were going to have to ride this one out.

The Sea of Galilee is the lowest lake in the world, and with the mountains nearby, it is prone to unpredictable storms. Matthew indicates that this one sprang up on them out of nowhere.

I think it’s important to point out that Jesus had been the one with the idea to cross the lake when they did. The disciples didn’t do anything wrong that resulted in them getting caught in the storm. They hadn’t missed signs in the clouds or anything.

We tend to blame ourselves when bad things happen. And sometimes we are the cause -- like Pigpen from Peanuts. We create our own duststorm that follows us around all the time. I once worked with a woman like that. She was a walking disaster, whether it was her health or her relationships or her apartment – she always had some incredibly bad news going on, and you got the feeling that she manufactured half of it herself. She just seemed to have poor judgment.

We can cause a lot of our own pain. But not all storms are because we messed up. Sometimes life is just hard. Some storms are unexpected and unpredictable. We don’t have to assume that we did something wrong every time.

The book of John tells the story of a man who was blind from birth. The disciples were trying to figure out what he did to deserve that condition, so they asked Jesus, “Who sinned? Was it him? His parents?”

### **John 9:3**

*"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.*

Some of you are wracked with guilt and suffering deep shame, thinking you must somehow deserve to be suffering whatever crisis you're going through. But there is more to a crisis than punishment. Not every storm is a consequence, but every storm is an opportunity. No matter what the cause, it is not the end of the road. God is big enough and good enough that he can take something horrible and squeeze glory from it. Light shines in the darkness and darkness has not overcome it.

This storm was nobody's fault, but a great chance for a demonstration of God's power. The Greek word Matthew uses to describe the storm is “mega”, which means just what it does in English – really big. Mark calls it a “furious squall” and Luke describes the “raging waters.” It was a mega-storm.

As I said, the disciples made their living out on this lake. They fished at night all the time and had no doubt seen some rough weather. So for them to be terrified says a lot. This mega-storm is bigger than they can handle.

You can picture the scenario. The boat rising up over each swell then crashing back down and getting swamped. Some disciples bailing water as fast as they can, some running to take down the sail, others straining at the oars. They are doing everything they can think of to keep the ship from capsizing or sinking. Frantic chaos as they do their best to fight this storm. And that's just what's happening on the outside.

### **When is the storm not the storm?**

Another storm is brewing in their hearts and minds. The hurricane like weather is mirrored by hurricane like thoughts and feelings. Desperation. Anxiety. Sheer terror. Can you relate to that situation? It's the internal stuff that becomes way bigger than the external stuff. And we scramble around, doing everything in our power to beat it.

Meanwhile, there's Jesus in the stern, sleeping like a baby.

Now at first, they no doubt didn't want to disturb him. He had had an exhausting day with the crowds. And they wanted to respect him as their leader and not impose on him. But when the storm isn't quitting and he's just lying there, it seems all wrong. Mark quotes the disciples as saying, “Teacher, don't you care if we drown?”

Don't you care? That is often our question. When God is silent in the face of our pain, when there seems to be no effort on his part to intervene and do something, we are

baffled and ask, “Don’t you care, God? We’re drowning and you’re doing nothing. Are you really asleep?”

The disciples see Jesus sleeping and interpret it as indifference to their situation. In reality, it was the answer to their situation. Not that he was asleep, but that he COULD sleep. There is a quiet strength in him that the disciples need.

Have you ever seen a picture where one person is standing absolutely still, and all the people passing by are just a blur of motion? It looks like the one who isn’t moving is the only one that’s solid. That’s what’s going on with Jesus. He’s the only one who is solid. Lying there with his eyes closed, undisturbed by all that’s going on around him, Jesus embodies a depth of calm that rises above the wind and waves. He is a rock at rest while chaos swirls around him. And it is out of that complete calm that he will be able to speak calm into the storm. His words come from who he is.

When I think of my own crisis prayers, I am usually intense and in a panic. “Help! God, PLEASE! Do something NOW!!” And my idea of an answer is for God to join me in my panic, for him to match my mood. But that’s just not his way, and it’s not what I really need, either. I need a God who is NOT driven by fear and anxiety, but by his own sense of security and being in control. He comes at the problems that face me from a completely different direction than I do.

When Jesus was in that boat, he knew that his Father had a plan and a purpose for him beyond that day at sea, and no storm could threaten that purpose. Jesus knew he wasn’t in true danger because he knew there was much more still in store for him. His ability to remain calm through everything was grounded in his firm conviction that God the Father always does what he says he’s going to do. Nobody with Jesus was going to drown that night because God wouldn’t let them. It was as simple as that.

Hear this: No storm is a match for God’s purposes in your life. When Christ is in your boat, the wind and the waves can pound away, but they will not take you down. As Isaiah says,

**Isaiah 43:2**

*When you pass through the waters,  
I will be with you;  
and when you pass through the rivers,  
they will not sweep over you.*

Christ in our lives is the same as Christ in the boat. He represents God’s purpose in us. That’s why we can have confidence that God won’t let the storms destroy us. God is doing something and will work at it until it is completed.

That’s good to know, but hard to always believe. The disciples aren’t feeling confident at all. They are scared to death. So they wake Jesus with the cry, “Lord, save us!”

It's a pretty feeble little prayer. They don't seem to have very high expectations Jesus can do much. But they go to him anyway. When he wakes up, Jesus doesn't get upset with them for disturbing his sleep. And he doesn't jump up and rush to fix the problem. He pauses first to comment on their lack of belief. "You of little faith. Why are you so afraid?"

The disciples only have a little faith. A puny amount of faith. And yet, it seems to be enough. Jesus responds and calms the storm. Jesus would later tell them that even if their faith was as small as a mustard seed, it would be enough to move mountains. They did exactly the right thing with their tiny shred of trust – they went to Jesus and said, "Lord, save us." Even though they had no assurance he would or could do anything, they went to Christ in their hour of need.

The very act of praying and asking God for help is an act of mustard seed faith. You may not even have the strength in you to believe God will do the impossible. But if you take your crisis to him anyway, asking him to step in and save you, he will respond.

### **Joel 2:32**

*Whoever calls, 'Help, GOD!' gets help.*

As I said, I don't think the disciples really had very high expectations about what "save us" might look like. They certainly didn't expect Jesus to do what he did. Maybe they thought he would help them row or bail water. Maybe they think he can somehow make the boat go faster. Or maybe they're hoping he can boost morale and provide leadership as an example of courage.

But Jesus went way beyond that. He took charge of the storm like a parent disciplining a child. Matthew tells us he rebuked the wind and he rebuked the waves. It sounds like those are the same thing, but really they're different.

Rebuking the wind is *dealing with the source*. There would be no waves if not for the wind. The wind is what is creating all the difficulty as it whips the water into a frenzy. The wind is the part of the storm you don't see, but that's an incredibly powerful hidden source. Jesus knows what the wind is doing, and he goes straight to it and shuts it down.

When it comes to rebuking the waves, Jesus is *dealing with the symptoms*. They're the visible evidence of the storm. And even if the wind dies down, it would take a long time for the water to get back to normal. Jesus intervenes and restores sanity and safety by addressing the effects of the wind.

God takes a very holistic approach to his work. He's not interested in only fixing one piece of the problem – he takes on the whole package. I think that's helpful to realize when we come to our own storms. Anyone recovering from any type of addiction or eating disorder or depression knows that there are always these two parts, and if you never address the wind, the waves aren't going to stop. Jesus cares about what you're

doing to yourself, but he also cares about why you're doing it. When we invite him to do something about our situation, he's going to work on both levels.

Think about anger, for example. That's something many people struggle with. They say and do hurtful things when they're in a rage. They know it and they don't like it, so they swear they're going to change. They may even ask God to help them control it.

But anger is a wave. It's a symptom that there are some strong winds blowing somewhere, even if they're invisible. And Christ's approach always addresses both the source and the symptoms. If we want him to do something about our anger, it's going to mean letting him go deeper than just the behavior. He needs to speak to the cause, and that may mean we need to deal with things from our past that we'd rather not. But that's the way to health. If we're going to say Lord, save us, we need to get out of the way and let him do it.

What's fantastic about the way Matthew writes this is how he explains what happened when Jesus spoke.

*Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.*

You can't see it in the English, but that word "completely" in front of calm is the same Greek root word he used to describe the storm. Where there was a mega-storm, Christ has replaced it with a mega-calm. His response does more than reduce the wind and waves – it reverses them completely. He creates the polar opposite conditions.

Author Philip Yancey writes this: *Some see miracles as an implausible suspension of the laws of the physical universe. As signs, though, they serve just the opposite function. Death, decay, entropy and destruction are the true suspensions of God's laws; miracles are the early glimpses of restoration.*

Christ is setting things right. He doesn't want to just manage our problems for us – he wants to change them from being centers of destruction to being signs of how life operates in God's kingdom. Jesus' idea of calm is not just to remove the chaos – it's to replace it with the presence of God's peace and wholeness. That's mega-calm.

Can you imagine what it was like to watch the water go from being a roller coaster to smooth glass instantly? Hearing the howl of the wind go silent. That kind of thing just doesn't happen. The disciples are stunned, and they're left grappling with what it means.

*What kind of man is this? Even the winds and waves obey him!*

### **When is the miracle not the miracle?**

Jesus has stopped a storm and started a fire. Now he has the full attention of these men. What kind of man is this? They knew he was a brilliant teacher. They knew he had the

powers of a great medicine man. There are a few other people in history who can make that claim. But nobody turns off the rain like a faucet. Nobody flattens a sea with their voice. What kind of man is this?

This is the crux of the whole story. Even beyond rescuing his disciples from peril, Jesus has another agenda, and that is to reveal more of himself to his followers. He wants their eyes to be opened and their faith to be multiplied. He wants them to see how far reaching his power and authority really is. He wants them to understand the implications for how far his mega-calm can reach into their own lives.

What kind of man is this? What kind of Jesus have we come to believe in? Is he a nice distraction on Sundays? A way to help our kids have good morals? Have we tamed him into some kind of house pet?

Mike Erre wrote a book called “The Jesus of Suburbia,” which he would describe as a cheap imitation of the real thing. He contends we’ve settled for something far less than who Christ really is.

*We like the comfortable clarity of the Jesus of Suburbia over the ravenous wonder and fear the real Jesus brings...He is so much bigger than we make him out to be.*

I could ask you this morning to spend some time identifying your storms, looking at what is causing your anxiety. Or we could take a few minutes to reflect on what your boat is – where you live and work that can be transformed.

But really, the most important question to think about is, “Who’s in your boat?” How well do you know this Jesus, and what do you believe he’s capable of in your life?

Every storm is an opportunity, not just to see God’s rescue, but to know him better. He won’t always handle it the way he did that day on the lake. The wind and waves don’t always subside instantly. Even Paul found that out when he was shipwrecked in a storm. But God preserved him, and God will preserve us. And however he chooses to do that, he will also help us see and know him better.

As we wrap up today, I’m going to ask Scott to come and sing a song for us that comes straight out of this story. Whatever storms you’re experiencing today, I hope that as you listen to the words, you’ll cry out to Jesus and say, “Lord, save me! I’m drowning. I need you.” He is the Calm One, and he is ready to bring his calm into your world.