

18. Perfecting storm

January 31, 2016

I can comfortably say that the majority of us in this room has not experienced any big storm in the middle of the sea. We have no idea what it is like to be tossed around in the sea. Whether it is a storm, cyclone, hurricane, or tsunami, it is not something we can ignore, if we are in the middle of the sea or nearby.

I was told that when the tsunami enters the shallow water of coastlines in its path, the velocity of its waves diminishes, but the wave height increases. It is in these shallow waters that a large tsunami can increase to heights exceeding 100 feet and strike with devastating force. It is like a 10 story building collapsing on you at once.

We may not have any experience of storms at sea, but we all have gone through our own storms in our lives. It might be in the form of serious illness, loss of a family member, marital problem, financial disaster, etc.

This morning we are going to meet a leper in the middle of his own physical storm and a group of Jesus' disciples who was doing what they were told, but facing an actual storm that seemed like it was going to drown all of them. I believe that the Lord has a perfecting storm lesson for all of us.

A. IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STORM OF LEPROSY

Mark 1:40-45 Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." 41 Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." 42 As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. 43 And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once, 44 and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." 45 However, he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction.

Leprosy was one of the most terrible diseases of the ancient world. Today, leprosy afflicts 15 million across the world, mostly in third world nations. It begins as small, red spots on the skin. Before too long the spots get bigger, and start to turn white, with sort of a shiny, or scaly appearance. Infection easily sets in, and this leads to degeneration of the tissues. The limb becomes deformed and eventually falls off. It was literally a dead man walking.

As horrible as the physical suffering was, the worst part of having leprosy might have been the way people had to treat lepers. In the OT, God said that when there were lepers among the people of Israel, they should be carefully quarantined and examined. Lepers had to dress like people who were in mourning for the dead, because they were considered to be the living dead. They had to warn the people around them by crying out, "Unclean! Unclean!" whenever people were near them. This really wasn't because leprosy is highly contagious, rather it is because God used this disease as a striking example of sin and its effects on us.

Leprosy is often used as a type of sin in the Bible. Here are seven connections I'd like to show you:

- 1) Sin sears and deadens a person's conscience as leprosy deadens a person's nervous system not to feel pain.
- 2) Sin, like leprosy, disfigures a person in his heart and the person doesn't even realize that he is allowing this sin to destroy all the people he loves and things he worked so hard and the relationship with the very God who gave His life for him.
- 3) Sin, like leprosy, isolates a person from other believers.
- 4) Sin, like leprosy, is contagious.
- 5) Sin, like leprosy, brings a horrible death.
- 6) Sin, like leprosy, has no cure by human effort. Only God can heal.
- 7) Sin, like what leprosy does to a person physically, does to a person spiritually.

This particular leper was in the middle of his physical storm of leprosy. It seems that there was no hope for him to live on. Each day was worse than before. Until he heard the news about this Man from Galilee who healed sick people. So, he came to Jesus. The leper knew that Jesus was able to heal him, but he was not sure the Master was willing to heal leprosy.

In response to the leper's cry, Jesus did the unimaginable for an ancient Jew. He touched the leper. Someone could accuse Him that He broke the law of Moses by touching the leper. No, He didn't break the law, because the moment He touched the leper, he became whole and no more leprosy was found in him. How long had it been since he had felt the tender touch of another human being? How long since he had belonged and been welcome among others?

Let's put this in our terms. How do we treat other brothers and sisters who come to us in desperation with their deepest cries and needs? Do we shove them off with a quick pre-formatted prayer as a lip service? Do we ignore them because they are not worthy of our time and effort since they are not in the so-called same class as we are?

If we do that, we ought to be ashamed of ourselves. While we were still sinners, Jesus reached down to the wretched people like us and touched us to make us whole. And He still forgives our sins, doesn't He? Shouldn't we do the same? I hope and pray that none of us think that we are some special class of people because we have more spiritual awareness than others. We are all sinners forgiven by the grace of God.

With that said, I must caution you about the idea of cheap grace that floats around within the Christendom. Let me draw a word picture here. A believer committed rather a deep sin. When he got caught, he immediately said, "I repent." So far, so good. No problem of forgiveness there. After his confession of his sin, if he, right away, expects those who are around him to restore him just as before and treat him as if nothing ever happened, he is expecting the cheap grace that has no consequences of his sin. That is unbiblical. A truly repented sinner does not demand any-

thing from anyone. He simply is grateful that the Lord and the people around him are willing to take him back in. He should live the life that reflects his repented heart while he goes through the consequences of his own sin without complaining and demanding.

B. IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STORM OF THE SEA

Matthew 8:23-27 Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" But He said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. So the men marveled, saying, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"

The Sea of Galilee is 13 miles long and 8 miles wide. It lies approximately 680 feet below the Mediterranean Sea. When the cool currents rush down from Mt. Hermon which is 9200 feet high and collide with the warm air that comes from the Mediterranean Sea right in the middle of this Sea, it produces violent winds without warning that causes high waves on this seemingly peaceful lake.

Did Jesus know that the storm was coming? Of course, He did! The storm was a part of that day's curriculum. Jesus can be trusted in the storms of our lives. Many people have the idea that storms come into their lives only when they have disobeyed God, but this is not always the case. Jonah ended up in a storm because of his disobedience, but the disciples got into a storm because of their obedience to the Lord.

Pastor and author Gayle Erwin tells the story of a boat trip across the Sea of Galilee with a tour group when the wind, rain, and waves began to kick up. A young man on the boat thought, "What Would Jesus Do?" and stood up to rebuke the storm. When he spoke out, "Peace, be still," the rain and wind kept coming, but the engine of the boat immediately stopped. I am sure that the rest of the group gave him that look.

Please go to Mark 4:35 to see what Jesus said which was not recorded in Matthew 8:
Mark 4:35 On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side."

What the disciples of Jesus – like the rest of us – did not realize is that faith must be tested before it can be trusted. It is one thing to learn a new spiritual truth, but quite something else to practice that truth in the everyday experiences of life.

The disciples' problem was not the storm around them, rather the unbelief within. Actually, our unbelief is more dangerous than the storm that happens in our life.

The disciples failed this test of faith because they did not lay hold of Jesus' word that He was going to the other side. Faith is not believing in spite of circumstances. It is obeying in spite of feelings and consequences. The disciples looked around and saw the danger, and looked within and saw their own fear. But they failed to look up by faith and see God. Faith and fear cannot coexist in the same heart.

See the peace Christ displayed – able to sleep in a dangerous storm. This is the peace we can have when we know we are in the center of God's will. It only comes from the Father.

Philippians 4:6-7 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and

the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Then, questions still come up in our minds. Why does God bring tests into our lives? Is it because He wants to give us a hard time or embarrass us? No. It is because God wants us to learn. He wants us to mature spiritually. God wants us to learn to trust Him even when we don't understand Him and His ways.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Hebrews 12:6 For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."

Although God will discipline us when necessary, the word "chasten" also means "to train." God wants to train us. He wants us to grow. He loves us so much that He doesn't want us to remain as when we were unbelievers, rather He brings a series of tests and lessons into our lives to whip us into the shape of Jesus. Those very tests, those very difficulties, and those very obstacles are the indications of God's love for us.

There are three kinds of storms in our lives:

1) Correcting Storm – It comes from our own faults and mistakes. We are the ones who caused it. If we are immature in the Lord, we tend to blame God for this storm even though it is our own faults. For example, we run up charge cards before Christmas and crying out to God when the bill is due in January. Or a guy or gal ran wild and sleep with just about anyone who comes their way, then he or she realizes that they now have the AIDS virus. There are many examples we find around our lives.

Here is a question for this storm. Did we learn from this storm? If we did, something good came out of this storm that God allowed us to go through. But if we haven't, the storm might continue until we learn.

2) Protecting Storm – Right after Jesus fed 5,000 plus people, they wanted to make Him their king even by force. The disciples got excited by that idea. Because if their Master becomes a king, they will also become something significant in the upcoming kingdom. But Jesus knew better and took them across the sea and allowed a storm to come by to get their attention. Jesus was protecting His disciples from the multitudes.

While great and godly things happen in our lives, sometimes our heads get too big. Then God who loves us very much, allows a storm of protection to come by to make us realize that it is not by our own efforts, but by His.

3) Perfecting Storm – God allowed Joseph to go through over a decade of slavery and imprisonment to bring him up to be the prime minister of Egypt. God put Moses through 40 years of wilderness as a shepherd to make him to be the one who led the Israelites in the mass Exodus.

This is one of the most-difficult-to-understand-storms. Why? Because we'd prefer to be mature in the Lord without any trials, tests, and storms. The people who work at the Biosphere in Oracle had to anchor down the trees inside of that place. Because without the wind, the tree becomes so weak and cannot stand on its own weight. But

the trees near around the ocean are strong with deep roots, because they learned how to survive through difficult raging storms. We cannot be greenhouse Christians, but rough, tough, and seasoned Christians who endured the storms of lives.

By His word, Jesus controlled the wind and the sea, and there was an immediate calm. The only things still churning were the disciples' hearts. They were wondering who this Man truly was. We can go from a "great storm" to a "great calm" because of a great Savior! How thankful we should be that Christ who calms the storms of life!

C. APPLICATIONS

- 1) Our sin makes us **STUPID** and disconnects us from the Lord.
- 2) Sometimes God calms the storm. But sometimes God lets the storm rage and calms His child.
- 3) Faith and fear cannot coexist in the same heart.