

A STORM TRAINING

Mark 4:35-41

Key Verse: 4:40

He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

As this passage begins, Jesus and his disciples set out to have a retreat. They had been very busy taking care of the crowds of people. Many times, they did not even have time to eat (3:20). They really needed a short vacation. On their way, however, they met a fierce storm, and their vacation was spoiled. But on the stormy sea, Jesus revealed himself--who he really is--and trained his disciples to overcome storms by faith. We also face many big and small storms in life. I pray that God may help us to learn how to overcome our storms by faith.

I. "LET US GO OVER TO THE OTHER SIDE" (35-36)

Let's think about what had transpired before Jesus contemplated on this vacation plan. After his inauguration as the Messiah at the Jordan River, Jesus taught the word of God, healed the sick and drove out demons, day after day. He said to them, "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (1:15) When Jesus preached the word of God, the people responded with amazement. They said, "What is this? A new teaching--and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him" (1:27). However, where there was work of God, there was also work of Satan. The Pharisees tried very hard to hinder his ministry. They constantly searched for a basis to accuse Jesus. Even his own family members said that Jesus was out of his mind, because he skipped meals to take care of many lowly sick people (3:21) while offending the religious leaders. When Jesus shepherded the flock of God, he was despised and rejected. Nevertheless, Jesus overcame Satan's attacks through prayer. It was hard, however, for his young disciples to bear with such persistent persecutions. Most of all, it was hard for them to follow their irregular eating schedule. Jesus knew that they needed a break.

Look at verse 35. *That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side."* Jesus' suggestion was very unusual. Although their mission base was near the Sea of Galilee, they rarely went over to "the other side" of the sea. Why not? It was a Gentile territory. No self-respecting Jewish man would go there. So when Jesus said to them, "Let's go over to the other side of the lake," they must have had a puzzled look on their faces. But, before long they figured out what it meant; it was a vacation time! All twelve disciples became very excited.

Look at verse 36. *"Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him."* Earlier that day, Jesus taught the word of God in a boat to a crowd of people all day long. By the day's end, the disciples were very weary and tired. And they were very happy to leave the crowd behind. They began to shout, "Let's go!" Normally they would follow Jesus behind him, but this time, the disciples were in charge. They took Jesus along, just as he was, in the boat.

The sea was unusually calm as they began the crossing. The gentle water of the lake splashed and sparkled along the boat under the moonlight. The sound of their rowing was rhythmical because some of them were seasoned fishermen of the sea. The boat was gliding on the calm water. They began to hum joyful songs. They did not realize that they were in for a big trouble.

II. A STORM TRAINING (37-41)

Look at verse 37. *“A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.”* The disciples were blindsided by a furious squall. A squall is a sudden, violent storm at the sea. The Sea of Galilee is surrounded by plateaus, beyond which rise great mountains. Rivers flowing from the mountains over the plateaus into the lake carve out deep ravines. These ravines play the role of funnels, drawing down cold wind from the mountains and thus causing a sudden storm to rise. A storm on this lake is unpredictable.

Waves beat into the boat, and it began to fill with water. Four of the disciples were seasoned fishermen who had braved many storms in the past, and they tried to steer the boat as skillfully as possible. But it did not work. They lost control. They began to panic as the storm threatened their lives. It was dark and the waves seemed to be rising higher by the minute. Their vacation spirit was gone. They feared for their lives. How could they survive this crisis? We can learn several spiritual lessons from their experience.

First, peace with Jesus. What was Jesus doing all the while? Look at verse 38a. *Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion.* Jesus had fallen into a deep sleep in the stern, that is, the rear part of the boat. It was a moment of quiet peace for Jesus. This shows that Jesus was fully human, just like us (Heb 2: 14). He fell asleep after having an exhausting workday. The disciples were quite upset with Jesus who seemed to be unaware and unconcerned about their troubles. But that was not true. Most certainly Jesus knew what was going on. And he certainly cared about his disciples. Yet, why was he sleeping? Why didn't Jesus wake up quickly and take care of them? We have to realize that God often allows us to go through trials in life, not because he doesn't care, but because he really loves us. Jesus let them struggle by themselves for a while. This was his deeper love. We want all our troubles taken care of by the Lord instantaneously. That is what we think the loving God should do for us. But Jesus often wants us to experience storms on our own for a while and become stronger. Jesus allowed his disciples to struggle on their own while he relaxed in the stern. How can we have peace in the midst of a storm? We should never forget that Jesus is with us in our boat. We should remember that he is fully aware of what's going on and he wants us to overcome the storm by faith in him.

Once the apostle Peter was arrested for preaching the gospel of Jesus. The next day he was to be executed. But Acts 12:6 says: “The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance.” How could he sleep in that situation? The Newsweek magazine reported that many Americans have trouble sleeping at night. Worries of this uncertain world make them anxious. But Peter could face his death with the peace of God. He must have remembered Jesus' words in John 14:27: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give

you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

Second, waking up Jesus. Look at verse 38 again. *Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”* The disciples finally remembered that Jesus was in the boat with them. They woke him up. Like children who are scared of a monster at night, they said to Jesus, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” It was their way of praying to the Lord. May God help us to learn to pray earnestly, reminding the Lord that we really need his help in the storms of our life!

Third, Jesus is the Creator God. What did Jesus do when his disciples woke him up? Look at verse 39. *He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.* It says that Jesus rebuked the wind. And at his rebuke, the wind died down. This sounds somewhat strange. To rebuke is to correct a person so that he may do what is right. We do not rebuke things or the nature. Would you rebuke the sun for giving you a sun burn? But Jesus rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the stormy sea became quiet and still. This event reveals that Jesus is the Creator God. Jesus is God who controls even the nature. Jesus is God. We should never forget that. The President of the U.S. is a powerful man. But even he is helpless before the nature. When a powerful hurricane sweeps through an area, all he can do is declare the region as a federal disaster area and provide low-interest loans to victims. But our Lord Jesus is different. He is the Creator God who orders the nature to obey him.

After calming the sea, what did Jesus say to his disciples? Look at verse 40. *He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”* What was the disciples’ response? Look at verse 41. *They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”* This is what Jesus wanted them to learn about himself. He is the Creator God who can even order the nature. It is also important for us to know that Jesus is the Creator God. Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Many questions in life are answered when we accept this truth in our hearts—questions such as “Who is God? Who am I? Why am I here? What will happen when I die?”

Up until this point, his disciples were living together and traveling with Jesus. They sensed that Jesus was an extraordinary person when they saw his healing touch on the sick people. Yet they still did not know who Jesus really was. But when they saw Jesus rebuke the wind, they realized that Jesus is God who rules the heavens and the earth. They asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” For the first time the disciples came to know that Jesus is the Creator God.

Fourth, “Why are you so afraid?” Jesus had intended to have a quiet retreat with his disciples. But the storm provided an opportunity for him to train his disciples. Look at verse 40. *Jesus said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”* Jesus rebuked them because they were full of fear. The storm was not the real problem. The real problem was their lack of faith.

Jesus wanted to raise his disciples to be the future leaders for his people. They had to be warriors of faith in order to take care of their wandering sheep. But when the sea became violent, they were overwhelmed by fear. Jesus said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” They should have trusted in God. Their fear showed that they did not have absolute faith in Jesus. Fear is planted by Satan; courage comes from faith in Jesus.

Jesus rebuked his disciples for being afraid. They panicked even though Jesus was right there with them. There are two kinds of fear. One is a healthy kind and the other unhealthy. The Bible teaches us that the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge. Proverbs 1:7 says: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.” We must learn to have the reverent fear of God. We must accept and obey the word of God as the word of God. However, the fear of the disciples was the unhealthy kind. It originated from their lack of trust in Jesus. God commands us to trust him in all things. No matter what happens, God does not want us to be paralyzed with fear. God tells us to call upon him in the days of trouble (Ps 50:14-15). In Isaiah 43:1-2 we read, *But now, this is what the Lord says—he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.”* God does not ask us to silence the storm or put out the fire with our strength. His command is, “Fear not.”

The Bible teaches us that there are two kinds of leaders. One is those who become fearful in times of crisis. Their fear comes when they have no faith in God. King Ahaz was an example. He had just taken over the throne of King Uzziah, who had ruled Israel for 52 years. Now he had to face the growing threat of the allied armies of northern Israel and Aram. God told him to trust the Lord. But he was gripped with fear at the news of the allied army’s invasion. He began to tremble like the trees in the forest when they are shaken by the wind. Then all his people also trembled. God spoke to him through his servant Isaiah. “If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all” (Isa 7:9b). But Ahaz did not trust God the Almighty. He died as a godless man. He led his people to be godless people.

On the other hand, let’s consider David. He was a man of faith in God. David was only a boy when he overheard the taunting words of the Philistine giant, Goliath, who threatened the army of Israel. The young David said, “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1Sa 17:26b) The truth was that the army of Israel was gripped with fear. But David challenged Goliath. His only weapon was his slingshot. Actually his real weapon was his faith in the Almighty God. In a duel, David struck the giant on the forehead with a pebble stone. Goliath fell with a loud bang.

Jesus knew that his disciples needed faith in God to become spiritual leaders. So instead of comforting them, Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith. Here we have to think about ourselves. Do we have faith that Jesus is God who rules the heavens and nature? Do we have the fear of God and fear nothing else in the world? If we have the unhealthy fear in our hearts, we must purge it by trusting in the Lord.

Fifth, storms of life. Life is often compared to a voyage on a sea. We all want to have a smooth sailing. But the fact of life is that we have to confront many small and big storms of life. Some people face the storm of a broken family. Some confront the storms of financial difficulty, health problem, and various other problems. No one's life is without storms. In fact, life is about how to overcome a series of storms. In this passage, we learn that we can overcome the storms of life with faith. With faith, we can please God and experience a sense of victory. Without faith, one's life can be engulfed by a storm.

There are two kinds of storms that strike people. One kind is what we experience when we reject God's commands. Troubles and distresses often follow those who disobey God. The prophet Jonah rejected God's command when he was told to go and preach in the city of Nineveh. But Jonah did not want his enemies to repent and be saved. So he bought a one-way ticket to Tarshish in the opposite direction of Nineveh. God sent a great storm to rebuke his disobedience. The other kind is a storm that arises even as we obey God. The disciples were on the way to the other side of the sea according to Jesus' instruction. Yet, the disciples met a storm in the course of obeying Christ. This kind of storm is harder to endure. A car accident of a teenage son or daughter can rob parents of hope. In such situations, some people ask, "Why God?" or "Why me?" Jesus' answer is, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

Stormy experiences don't always have to be terrifying. The same storm can be viewed as only a tropical storm when we trust God, or as a level-5 hurricane (with the wind speed more than 150 mph) when we don't have faith. As this passage teaches us, storms are under God's control. They are within God's purpose. For our spiritual growth, storms are even necessary. Our faith grows through stormy days. In our life of pilgrimage, God allows some storms of life for our good.

Like the disciples in this passage, through storms of life we come to know Jesus better. Through storms of life he becomes real to us. God may not always deliver us from our troubles. But he is always with us and urges us to have faith in him. Then after many storms of life, we will enter God's glory. This is the ultimate deliverance. Therefore, let us pray that God may help us to depend on him through all storms of life.

In this passage, we learn that Jesus is the Creator God who controls the heavens and the earth. He knows what we are going through. He wants us to have faith in him in all situations. May God help us to be courageous men and women of faith!