

After a Storm Comes a Calm

I started using a new calendar last year that allows me to keep all of my appointments, personal and work all in one nice, easy to find place. Believe me, it was a great idea when I first got it midway through last year. I could clearly write and review goals I had set for myself, note things to do. I can check to see how I am doing, and see where I need to make any adjustments. Review tasks at months' end. It had been working fine this year until work and personal life really got combined into one. nice. easy to find place.

My goals weren't earth shaking by any stretch, but they were my goals, and checking them off was kind of fun. Then something changed. On Friday February 13th I wrote at the bottom of that day-DAY 1. I still had goals, but they took a back seat to the storm we all found ourselves in.

The calendar even has little motivational quotes and sayings for each week, this week for example has a quote by Matthew Henry "After a storm comes a calm." Last weeks was the halfway point of the year and it called for me to do some reflecting on the year so far, which is always beneficial to review things that went right, but not always easy to review things that had gone wrong. For the week of July 27th, there is a quote from Bruce Lee, and it says "As you think, so shall you become." Quite a few of the quotes have a distinctive biblical influence. To me, I find those quotes very interesting, they serve as reminders that God is always with us not only in our storms, but through them. And we always need to remember that.

There are plenty of storms in the Bible, like the one we heard last Sunday about Noah and the Ark. Now, that was a storm! 40 days of rain, flooded the whole earth! And after that storm ended, the earth dried, and the dove came back with an olive leaf in its mouth. And the promise from God, a rainbow! Who doesn't feel calm when you see a rainbow in the sky, especially after a storm.

Jonah. Had a storm. God gave Jonah a direct order, "Go to Nineveh!" God wanted Jonah to preach to the Ninevites that they may repent of their sins, so they could be spared. Jonah wanted nothing more than to see Nineveh wiped from the face of the earth; of the Ninevites Jonah was no fan. God had other plans, he wanted Nineveh to repent of its wickedness. Jonah had a decision to make. He was afraid that Nineveh would repent, so- he ran; he figured that if he wasn't there to preach to the Ninevites they would not repent, and God wouldn't spare them. The great city would be destroyed because they did not find favor with God. One small problem Jonah did not consider, HE was not that important!

But he was to God. Sometimes God asks us to do things that we'd rather not, but we ultimately know it is the right thing to do. God wanted Jonah to preach to the Ninevites, So when Jonah went down to Joppa, paid his fare and boarded that ship to Tarshish. His storm was just beginning! The Lord sent a great wind that caused a violent storm, the ship was starting to break up. The sailors were frightened, so frightened that they

began to pray to their own gods. After they had awakened Jonah, the sailors cast lots to find out who caused the storm, and the lot fell on Jonah. The sailors knew that Jonah had run from the Lord, and Jonah knew that the only way to halt the storm was for him to be cast overboard. The sailors refused and instead tried their best to row back to shore, but the storm grew even more fierce than before. Then the sailors prayed to God, not their own gods, but to Jonah's God, then they threw Jonah overboard. The raging sea calmed, and the sailors praised the Lord.

Even though Jonah had run from the Lord, the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah. He was in the belly of that fish for 3 days and three nights. While he was inside the fish he prayed. The great fish released Jonah onto dry land. This time when the Lord called Jonah to go to Nineveh he obeyed. After Jonah preached, the entire city repented and turned from their evil ways, when God saw this he did not bring destruction to the city that he had threatened. Still, Jonah thought it was wrong that Nineveh had been spared, forgetting how God had spared him from perishing in the storm. Even when we do not realize it, God cares for all of us.

The disciples were in a storm. Jesus took his disciples to the other side of a lake, it was calm on the water so Jesus laid down and fell asleep. All of a sudden a storm kicked up and buffeted the boat, and it began to take on water. The disciples, for want of a better word, panicked. They woke Jesus up and pleaded with him "Master, Master, we're going to drown." What did Jesus do? He woke up and rebuked the wind, and the raging waters! The storm subsided, and all was calm. I can almost imagine the look on Jesus' face when he said to his disciples- "Where is your faith?" The disciples just looked at each other in amazement asking "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water. And they obey him!"

Peter. Had a storm. After Jesus fed the five thousand he made the disciples get into a boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while Jesus went up on a mountainside to pray. By that time the disciples were quite a far distance away. It was nighttime. Their boat was being assaulted by wind and waves. Shortly before dawn Jesus walked out to the disciples on the lake, when the disciples saw him walking on the water, they were terrified, and they thought they were seeing a ghost. "Have courage, it is I don't be afraid." But Peter needed to be reassured, so Jesus told Peter to come, Peter walked on the water towards Jesus, but he noticed the wind and became afraid. Peter had taken his eyes off Jesus. He started to sink into the stormy lake, immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught Peter. Jesus said to him "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Now why have I been talking about storms? Because they happen! They happen to all of us! Especially now, we are all in a storm, there is no wind, no raging seas, but it sure feels like a storm. We are all in this together, and we will come out of it together. We will be stronger, even though it may not seem that way now, just have faith that we will come out of it. Jesus faced a storm on the cross that no one, not even his disciples thought he would come out of. But he did come out of it!

Not only did he come out of it, but he brought us with him! He brought us out of our sin, he brought us out of our guilt, he brought us out of our shame, he brought us out of our fear! So Great! That is very good news. We are all free to live our lives unhindered by the constraints from that which Jesus freed us.

Maybe I should say that again, someone may not have heard me- We are free to live our lives unhindered by the constraints of from that which Jesus freed us! Someone still didn't hear me! Anyone who didn't hear that can just line up right behind me. I didn't quite catch that either. All of the Bible studies I have led and attended really filled me with the Holy Spirit at that moment. But days... minutes later I found myself again limited by those very same constraints that God sacrificed his son for, those same constraints that Jesus died for.

Even if most of our storms are out of our control we often worsen them when we have fear, when we lose faith, or when we doubt. We should be living free as Jesus wanted us to, yes, storms will come, we don't need to create our own by clinging to sin, guilt, shame, fear and doubt. When you think about it, the whole Bible is about a storm, from the fall right up until Revelation. Jesus is through all of it, and he knows what we are going through, we need to put our trust in him.

If you are going to take anything away from this message this morning, then let it be this- Storms will come into our lives, some we create ourselves, Paul sums this up perfectly in Romans 7:

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.

However, most come without warning, and there is nothing we can do about it. We can however, know that we have a more than competent savior who is with us, holding us up right when we need it. Protecting us, right when we need it. Comforting us, right when we need it. Just as He did with Peter when he faced his storm, even when he doubted, even when he took his eyes off Jesus. Just as He did with Jonah, even when he had disobeyed God. Just as he did with the disciples in their storm, even when they had lost faith. How can we expect any less from Jesus when it comes to us as we go through our storms?