

Casting Out Fear

“He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven.”

—*Psalm 107:29,30*

IN MARK’S GOSPEL, HE recounts a day when a large crowd gathered around our Lord Jesus as he was teaching on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. (Mark 4:1) The multitude was eager to hear his words, and Jesus boarded a boat where, just offshore, he continued to address the

people until the evening of the day.

Mark provides a wonderful narrative of the very moving scene that followed. “The same day, when the even was come, he [Jesus] saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side. And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships. And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And he said unto them,

Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”—Mark 4:35-41

This circumstance in Galilee demonstrated the vast difference between mature and immature faith. Jesus exhibited total faith and confidence in his Father to protect and preserve him in the midst of what appeared to be a desperate, possibly fatal, circumstance. The disciples, on the other hand, failed to demonstrate the same degree of confidence in their Master and his concern for them.

This experience was used to impart a vital lesson, yet one might ask if a loving Savior could not have instilled that lesson by means less terrifying? It is the psalmist who best answers that question by stating a most obvious fact. He declares that all who sail upon the sea must expect occasional storms. He speaks of those storms as though they are created by God, but it is more accurate to say they are permitted by God for instructive purposes. Their intensity is precisely calibrated to show to the child of God many wonders that could not otherwise be revealed.

Concluding with the words of our opening Scripture, the psalmist depicts those who are subject to stormy experiences while upon the sea. “They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger

like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end. Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven."—Ps. 107:23-30

IN THE SHIP

This psalm characterizes the experiences that all faithful Christians must endure while in the world. They are portrayed as analogous to mariners who go down to the "sea in ships" to do business in "great waters." The unbelieving world constitutes the great waters, spoken of more familiarly in the modern expression as the sea of humanity. Christ Jesus is the ship. Those who are in the "ship" of Christ Jesus during the present time are the Lord's people who sail upon that symbolic sea. The business of those in the ship of Christ is that of proclaiming and defending the Truth of God, as well as living according to his righteous principles and precepts under all circumstances of general opposition from an unbelieving world. While conducting their righteous business in that ship on the great waters, the child of God must be prepared to encounter deep currents and resistant forces as unseen and destructive as the wind.

The Apostle Paul reminds us, "We are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places."—Eph. 6:12, *New Living Translation*

The psalmist indicates that only those who “go down to the sea in ships” are privileged to “see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep.” Only those who are under sail, and driving toward their “desired haven,” will experience the wonder of “the deep things of God,” many of which can be revealed in their fullness only by extreme circumstances while in his service.—I Cor. 2:10

RISING AND FALLING

The stormy experiences of life were also seen by the psalmist. He says, “They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths.” The Lord’s spiritual mariners are sometimes carried so high by experiences that they seem almost carried to heaven’s height, but then they may plunge into a trough of deep trial. While in that condition their soul is melted because of the trouble. The buffeting and the pounding make the child of God “stagger” and “reel to and fro.” In their extremity, dazed and bruised, they may wonder if they are able to stay aboard the ship of Christ. As the strength of the storms reveals the true weakness of the mariners, they often feel they might be swept overboard. They have been brought to “their wits’ end [Hebrew: all their wisdom is swallowed up].”

The Christian can never calm the storm by his own wisdom. Though the immediate ferocity of the storm might diminish, it is usually only temporary. It will never become a lasting calm, and the wind will never totally subside to a sailing breeze. The waters will never be truly quieted because deep below the surface they will remain troubled, the more easily stirred when the wind rises once again.

If those who are in the ship of Christ persist in trusting in their own strength and wisdom, one day a storm will arise that may sweep them overboard into the sea. Exhausted and confused, such ones and their wisdom risk being swallowed up.

INCREASING FAITH

The Scriptures assure us that when we go down to the great waters, the Lord is ever present with us. He is prepared to help us avoid disaster, and he is ever eager to help us maintain a safe and true course toward our destination. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”—Ps. 46:1-3

The psalmist declares that the spiritual mariners who would avoid being swallowed up by the sea should “cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses.” (Ps. 107:28) That is what the Lord’s disciples did when on the Sea of Galilee. They did the right thing, but for the wrong reason. They cried unto the Lord in their distress, but their cry was born of terror and doubt about his ability and willingness to save them out of their trouble. The psalmist emphasizes that all spiritual mariners of mature faith will cry unto the Lord while in the very midst of their distresses, not from doubt and terror, but with thanksgiving and praise for the certain knowledge that he will, in fact, preserve them. Such faith and trust in the Lord was demonstrated by those

faithful men and women of Old Testament times.—
Ps. 11:1-7; Dan. 6:10

The psalmist does not say that the Lord will not allow further distresses, or that all troubles vanish and the course of the mariner will become smooth sailing ever after. The distresses noted are often the means by which the follower of Christ becomes more fully formed and develops more of the fruits of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22,23) When those in Christ cry unto the Lord in their trouble, they do not implore the Lord to make the experience vanish solely for their personal benefit. They do not seek to be guided around the storms to attain a life of ease. They cry that by those trials they may be made more nearly like their blessed Master, and more refined as gold from the fire. (I Pet. 1:7) They become more mature in the faith, and more nearly ready to praise him for their promised providential care.

IN FULL CONFIDENCE

When those who go down to the great waters cease attempting to preserve themselves by their own wit and wisdom, and when they cry unto the Lord in full confidence that he will hear and respond, true peace comes to them. “He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still,” the psalmist continues. A stillness settles over the child of God, not because the storm itself is immediately removed, but because fear of the storm is removed. (Isa. 26:3,4) Such have been brought to the realization that the very storms they are permitted to encounter are the truest indication that they are sailing in the proper course. They reach the inescapable conclusion that a course without the storms

would be a sure indication of not sailing in the proper direction. Their perception of the storm has changed entirely. No longer is there the fear of being engulfed by the waves. They have come to understand that every experience is in the hands of our loving God, and that progress is measured by mature faith in him. (Prov. 3:5,6) They have determined to remain in the ship in order to be carried through the storm. "Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven." (Ps. 107:30) Thankful for being delivered from the stormy experiences, they are convinced of the Heavenly Father's ability to guide and protect under all conditions while upon the great waters, and that he will steer them toward their desired haven.

The "desired haven" is the destination sought by every Christian who is walking in "newness of life" with the Lord. Paul explains, "We are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (Rom. 6:4) This is the reason we have undertaken the voyage, that we may reach our destination with mature faith and character. To make that journey we must go down to the sea. A successful voyage is not determined by conditions, but by our faith and the casting out of fear. That significant truth was conveyed by our Lord to his disciples that day at Galilee.

OTHER LITTLE SHIPS

Mark records another small detail in connection with the great event that took place on the Sea of

Galilee. He writes, "The same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side. And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships." (Mark 4:35,36) The other little ships, and those who were riding in them, may represent those who at times witness the stormy experiences of the consecrated. As the consecrated are tossed to and fro on their personal or collective stormy seas, others are often affected by those storms. When God makes the storm a calm for his consecrated child, it no doubt has a powerful effect on the bystanders who may have been witnesses to what had taken place.

The Apostle Paul introduced this thought in his second epistle to the church at Corinth. He cautions his brethren in Christ not to seek respite from their distresses merely for personal ease, but for the beneficial effect it will have on those who witness God's tender mercy exercised on behalf of his children who cry unto him in full faith, believing he will surely hear. Paul writes, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and

salvation. And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.”—II Cor.1:3-7

The cries of true Christians are more often cries of thanksgiving and praise to God, whether they are at peace or in the midst of distresses. They have learned that these are the means by which, in due time, they will be brought unto the desired haven. The spiritual mariners in Christ Jesus may cry out of their trouble for personal relief, but trust the sanctifying effect of God’s providence over them, and that their response will be an example and comfort to those in the other ships nearby.

What a blessing it is to realize the nature of God’s protecting hand over us that may often be manifest to others. The apostle brings this thought to our attention, saying, “Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.”—Heb. 10:32,33

The Apostle John tells us, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” (I John 4:18) Let us cast out fear as we abide in the ship of Christ, remembering these words from Paul: “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have: For He Himself has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”—Heb. 13:5,6, *New King James Version*. ■