

When Faith Fails, God Doesn't

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Preacher: Jeff Rafferty

[0 : 00] If you have your Bibles, I'd ask you, if you will, turn with me this morning to Mark chapter 6, Mark chapter 6, verses 45 through 56.

Mark chapter 6, verses 45 through 56, and the title of my sermon this morning is When Faith Fails, God Doesn't. Back in December of 1995, I graduated from Southern Seminary and I received my first church calling in Lornburg, North Carolina.

I was asked or called to go to Stewardsville Baptist Church in Lornburg. And so after Christmas, Michelle and I loaded up a U-Haul and we drove 12 hours with an ice storm chasing us the whole way and we arrived in Lornburg, North Carolina with great excitement, great anticipation.

You know, we knew God was going to do great and mighty things. After eight years of school, that's how long it took me to get through college and seminaries, eight years, and I was excited to be in my first church and see what God was going to do.

But little did I know, I walked right into the middle of a church fight. No one warned me, no one told me, but I walked right into the middle of a big church fight where the church was getting ready to split.

[1 : 19] This church ran about 400 and they had called their first minister of music and youth, a combination position. And the church was split between the musicians.

They loved him, the minister of music and youth. They loved him because he had taken their music to a whole new level. The youth side were against him. He was doing things differently than they had ever done before.

Instead of going to like centrifuge, he wanted them to go look up lodge. And so the older youth told the younger youth that if you support him and get behind him, then you're a traitor to the youth group.

And the parents got behind the youth and planned the trip to the centrifuge against the minister of youth's wishes. And so over the next couple of months, I found myself meeting with the deacons almost every night of the week up till midnight some nights discussing what were we going to do? How were we going to solve this problem? How were we going to keep the church from splitting and deal with the minister of music and youth? And I was a bit disillusioned as to what ministry really was.

[2 : 40] Coming out of seminary, having great expectations and great anticipation and walking right into the middle of that was a little bit disillusioned. But as I look back, I realized that I learned lessons and things throughout my life that are during that moment that have served me throughout ministry.

And God was working in that to resolve that situation to where, to my knowledge, only one individual temporarily left the church.

And God continued to use that church and do some great and mighty things. Have you ever been in a situation like that? Not quite being called to a church, but a situation or a circumstance where because you were being obedient to the Lord and following the Lord, you found yourself in situations or circumstances that were challenging, that were difficult, that were hard.

You know, maybe it was a work-related situation. Maybe it was a health situation you found yourself in. And you wondered, why is God allowing me to go through this?

Why is God not stepping in and solving this problem immediately and helping me in this situation?

Why is He allowing me to go through this much longer than I ever anticipated?

[3 : 58] Well, the disciples found themselves in a situation very much like this. And they found themselves in this situation because they had obeyed Jesus to do exactly what He had told them to do.

So let's look with us, or with me this morning, at Mark chapter 6, and we're going to read verses 45 through 56. Immediately, Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to Bethsaida while He dismissed the crowd.

After leaving them, He went up on a mountainside to pray. When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and He was alone on land. He saw the disciples straining at the oars because the wind was against them.

About the fourth watch of the night, He went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, but when they saw Him walking on the lake, they thought He was a ghost, and they cried out because they all saw Him and were terrified.

Immediately He spoke to them and said, Take courage, it is I. Don't be afraid. Then He climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves.

[5 : 15] Their hearts were hardened. He had just fed the 5,000. That's what that's referring to. When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there.

As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. They ran throughout the whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard He was. And wherever He went, into villages, towns, or countryside, they placed the sick in the marketplaces.

They begged Him to let them touch even the edge of His cloak, and all who touched Him were healed. Let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, we just thank You for Your Word.

We thank You for Your truth. And we thank You for the lessons that we can learn throughout Your Scripture. And I pray that You just speak to each of our hearts here today and just speak to us. And we thank You, Lord, for this. We praise You always. In Jesus' name, amen. Upon reading this passage, have you ever asked yourself the question, did Jesus know this storm was about to occur?

[6 : 27] You see, the Sea of Galilee was surrounded by hills and mountains. And from what I've read, storms could come down off those mountains and hit the Sea of Galilee, and they could be the strength of a hurricane.

We don't think of hurricanes in seas, but the Sea of Galilee is pretty large, and they could have had a hurricane-force storm go across it. Well, did Jesus know that this storm was coming?

Well, if you believe in the sovereignty of God and Jesus being fully man and fully God, then we have to conclude that, yes, He knew that storm was coming.

So that leads us to another question. Why, then, would Jesus send them out onto the Sea of Galilee if He knew this storm was coming? Why would He send them out in a little boat, out onto a sea, with a hurricane-force storm about to occur?

Well, Mark doesn't really give us any kind of indication here as to why that happened or why Jesus was eager to do that, but John does. John gives us some insight in John chapter 6, verse 15, and you can see it on the screen.

[7 : 36] This is the NIV version. Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make Him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by Himself.

You see that? The crowds did not fully understand at this moment in time the type of Messiah that Jesus had come to be. They had a very wrong understanding.

They had, as Jews, they had a very high messianic expectancy that God was going to send the Messiah, but what their thoughts were is that He was going to come in military might and power and He was going to conquer the Romans and give Israel their independence once again.

But you and I know today that that is not the type of Messiah that Jesus came to be. But that is the crowd. And after they saw Him feed the 5,000 and had worked several miracles of healing, they were about to come and take Jesus and make Him king by force.

And Jesus knew that the disciples would be safer in a boat out on the Sea of Galilee in the midst of the storm where He could care for them. They were safer in that situation than they would be in the midst of this crowd having a very wrong understanding of who He had come to be.

[8 : 58] You have to remember, the disciples were the same men who had argued who was the greatest in the kingdom of God. And they were very slow to understand. I don't think they really came to that understanding until after Jesus had been resurrected that they really began to understand and put things together.

Even though Jesus had told them numerous times throughout His ministry that He was coming to die, they still didn't get it. And so Jesus knew that they were safer in that boat out in the Sea of Galilee with a hurricane-force storm coming than they were in a crowd of people with the wrong understanding of who He was and getting ready to come and take them by force.

Now, what's also interesting in this passage is that Jesus had spent a lot of time with the people, long day, and He was tired.

He was human. He was tired and He was weary. It could have been easy for Him to have slipped away by Himself and gone to sleep. But Scripture doesn't tell us that, does it?

What did He do? He prayed. He went up into the mountains, which I got ahead of myself a little bit. He put the disciples in the boat, sent them away, and then dismissed the crowd.

[10:20] That really shows us how eager Jesus was to separate them from one another because normally, He would have dismissed the crowd and then put the disciples in the boat.

But He dismissed the disciples first. And then once the people had gone, He went up into the mountain to pray and He spent all night. If we read through the Gospels, we see this frequently where Jesus spends time alone with the Father in prayer.

And if Jesus is fully God and fully man all at once, and yet the necessity for Him to spend the entire night in prayer, that should say something to us today.

That should say something to the necessity that we have as children of God to be devoted to a very committed prayer life.

Not a quick passing prayer or not a prayer that just gives God a laundry list of things that we want Him to do for us, but to be devoted to a powerful prayer life.

[11:25] By the way, on Wednesday nights during prayer meeting, we're doing a study by Dr. Greg Frizzell on how to have a powerful prayer life. It's one of the best books that I've studied on how to develop your prayer life.

We would love for you to come out and be a part of that. We're going to be meeting in this room right beside the Welcome Center over the next few weeks because starting this week, they're going to be doing some work inside the sanctuary.

We all know the work going on outside the sanctuary, but there's going to be some work also being done inside the sanctuary. And so prayer meeting, we're going to move into that classroom right there by the Welcome Center.

It's room 250. And so we would love for you to come and to be a part of that because I'm firmly convinced the strength of the church is the strength of the individual's prayer lives.

A church will be no stronger than the prayer lives of its members. Prayer is a gift that God has given to us that we can enter into His presence and we can spend time alone with Him.

[12:36] We can grow in our walk with Him and our intimacy with Him and our relationship with Him. He speaks to us and reveals Himself to us through our prayer lives as we study His Word as a part of that.

And so I think prayer is vitally important to each individual and Jesus models that and shows that to us as well.

Now as we study this text today, our primary focus is going to be upon the disciples and the storms they found themselves in the midst of. And by studying this experience that the disciples found themselves in the midst of, I think there are four truths here that we can glean from this and we can hold on to and serve as assurances in our own lives that when we face the storms of life.

And so we're going to look at four assurances here because you know what they say, we all are either coming out of a storm, we're getting ready or we're in a storm or we're getting ready to go into the storm.

And we all know that we have faced challenges, difficulties and circumstances in our lives that are beyond our abilities to control.

[13:54] They're beyond sometimes our understanding. And sometimes we're there because we followed Christ and we question why is God allowing me to experience this?

Why is God letting this happen in my life? Well, one of those first assurances that we want to glean from this is that He brought us here. Jesus brought us here.

If we find ourselves in the midst of a storm today because we've been obedient to God, then we need to know that He's brought us here and He'll certainly care for us.

The storm came about in the life of the disciples because they were in the will of God. Not like Jonah who found himself in a storm because of disobedience.

And as we study Scripture, especially for the believer, we discover there are essentially two types of storms that we will experience in our lives. Storms of correction when God needs to discipline us and storms of perfection when God helps us to grow, when He helps mature our faith or He molds and shapes us.

[15:09] Jonah was in the storm because he disobeyed God. We all know the story. He was running in the opposite direction of where God had told him to go. And so God used a storm to correct him and to bring him back into His will.

The disciples were in the storm because they obeyed Christ. And Jesus was using this storm to develop their faith and their trust and their dependence upon Him.

He had tested them once before also in a boat. You remember? They were in the boat. Jesus was tired from a long day of ministry and He was asleep on the stern of the boat.

And the disciples, who many of them were fishermen, they still, the storm was beyond their ability to control and they woke Jesus up saying, do you not care that we're about to perish?

Well, Jesus had tested them in that moment when He was in the boat with them. But in the passage that we're looking at today, Jesus is growing their faith when He's not with them.

[16:16] He's wanting them to understand it doesn't matter whether He's in the boat, physically present with them, or He's far away and they can't see Him, they don't know He's around, He can care for them.

He can take care of them. He's well in charge of their lives. You see, Jesus knew that He wasn't going to always be with them. After His resurrection, He was going to ascend back into heaven.

And these would be the men who would have to take the gospel message to the world. that they would have to carry on the work and the ministry and the mission that Jesus began.

And they had to trust Jesus even when it seemed that He wasn't there with them. They had to learn to trust Him because they would indeed face many storms in their lives as they acted out in obedience to do what Christ had called them to do.

By the way, if you find yourself in a storm today because you've disobeyed God or because you've wandered from the faith, there's only one response that you can make and that is to confess your sin to Christ, ask for forgiveness, and then repent and turn back to Him.

[17:39] And 1 John 1.9 tells us it doesn't matter what you've done. It doesn't matter how far you've wandered. It doesn't matter if you think God's mad at you because He's not, that He will forgive us.

That if you confess your sin, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. So no matter how far you've wandered, no matter how many mistakes you've made, Christ is waiting for you to come back.

Now He may use storms to get your attention. He may use circumstances and situations because if we're a child of God and we've wandered from Him or we're disobedient to Him, He will discipline us.

The Word of God tells us that and sometimes it's the beginning of a still small voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to our heart and if we don't listen, He turns the heat up a little bit and if we still don't listen, we may find ourselves in the belly of a fish, you know, to try to get us back to Him because God loves us and He wants us in a committed relationship with Him and He knows what is best for our lives and so He's going to do what He needs to do to bring us back to Him.

Now, if you're sitting here today and you're not a believer, you're not a child of God, I also want you to know that Jesus loves you. He loves you and He's ready and He's willing to forgive you of your sin no matter what you've done, no matter how far you've gone, Jesus is ready and willing to forgive you.

[19:16] All you need to do is take that step to Jesus to ask Him to be your Lord and Savior, admit that you're a sinner and that you need forgiveness of your sin and again, 1 John 1, 9 tells us that He'll be quick to forgive you, to cleanse you and purify you with the blood that He shed on Calvary and adopt you into the family of God and later in the service when we do a time of invitation, if you do not know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I would encourage you to respond during the invitation and just simply come and pray with me or have me pray with you and have you ask Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Savior.

The second truth that we can glean from this passage that will be an assurance that we can hang on to and hold on to when we face the storms of life is that He is praying for us.

Now there's many places in Scripture such as John 17 and others where we know that Jesus is praying for us but I want to read out of Romans 8, 34. Who then is the one who condemns?

No one. Christ Jesus who died more than that who was raised to life is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Now I want to stop and just kind of really pick these two verses verses 47 and 48 apart here because I find them extremely interesting. When evening came the boat was in the middle of the lake and He was alone on land.

[20 : 54] Now pay attention here to what time of day it was when Jesus was alone. It says He was in evening. Now I'm not 100% sure if that's the same as our evening but it would have been you know late in the day probably before sunset that Jesus was alone and then look at verse 48 He said He saw the disciples straining on the oars.

So about evening time Jesus is up in the mountains alone praying. the disciples are probably miles away out in the middle of the Sea of Galilee it's getting dark and yet it said Jesus saw them.

Now that would certainly be the God side of Jesus that He saw them He knew their situation He knew their circumstances and He knew what they were up against.

Do you know Jesus knows you too and He sees you? Do you know that Jesus knows you intimately and everything about you?

He knows the circumstances the conditions everything going on in your life He knows the things you fear that you worry about you struggle with the challenges that you face He knows you very intimately and in detail.

[22 : 19] Does that make a difference to you of how you face situations and circumstances of life that you know that Jesus is not some God that's off in a far distance unconcerned and unaware of what you're going through but He sees you and He knows you and He loves you and He is praying and making intercession for you.

Let me ask you a question this morning. If you knew Jesus Christ was here in this room today let's say He was sitting in that chair and He was praying for you by name to the Father how would that affect you?

If you knew Jesus knew your situation the challenges you're up against the storms that you're facing maybe your fears your worries your struggles and you knew He was sitting here let's say He came to the altar and He kneeled down at the altar and He was praying for you by name would that change the way you face those struggles of life that you're up against?

Would that give you hope? Would that give you encouragement? Would that give you strength to keep going on and facing the things that you're up against?

Well Jesus is not only here in this place with us today but Romans tells us He's seated at the right hand of the Father and He's interceding for you He's praying for you by name He sees you He knows you and He knows the circumstances He knows the challenges He knows everything about you He knows your doubts your struggles with faith He knows all about it and He's making intercession for you praying for you by name I hope that would make a difference in your life and the way you face those storms of life but also I hope it would challenge us to have a deeper love for Christ to know that He's not some distant God but He's a God that intimately loves us now the third thing we want to gain from this passage today too is that

[24 : 50] He will come to us He will come to us in verse 48 we see the phrase He was about to pass them by now that doesn't mean that Jesus decided to walk across the Sea of Galilee and go on ahead and He was like y'all just get there the best way you know how that's not what that meant that same phrase is used in the Old Testament when God revealed Himself to Moses remember He hit him in the cleft of a rock and He walked God passed by and He revealed Himself to Moses so the same phrase same expression tells us that Jesus walking by should have been a revelation to the disciples that He was there with them He was in their presence He was there and it should have given them hope it should have given them courage and strength to know that once before Jesus has already calmed the storm when He was in the boat with us and we know that He cares about us and He can calm this storm with a spoken word and He's not going to allow anything to take place or happen in our life that's out of His will have you ever felt like where is God why doesn't He answer my prayers why doesn't He respond to me you know why is He allowing this to happen you know even in the Psalms

King David had those feelings he felt like God was distant and not responding to Him and wondered where He was but ultimately David knew that you couldn't trust your feelings you can't trust how we feel but rather the Word of God tells us that God says I will never leave you nor forsake you David knew that God was with him despite how he felt sometimes God allows us to go through these circumstances and these situations to grow us and to help us to develop a trust and a faith in Him even when we think He's not there and I also want to point out here something else when I talked about evening it said Jesus didn't go to them until the fourth watch some of you Bible scholars what's the fourth watch that's between three and six o'clock in the morning between three and six o'clock in the morning so Jesus saw them in the evening struggling against the waves and the wind and the storm a storm hurricane force that was beyond these rugged fishermen to handle and control and yet

He waited until the fourth watch wonder why He did that why did Jesus not rush out there immediately and rescue them why didn't Jesus speak a word to calm the storm my wife told me I should leave it there and go to find out the rest of the story you have to come back next week but I don't know that I'm going to be preaching next week so I'll have to go on and tell you sometimes God uses situation and circumstances to teach us life lessons and I believe that Jesus allowed those fishermen these disciples to get to the end of themselves to reach that point where they had no hope they could not save themselves they could not overpower the wind and the waves and get that boat to shore where they were safe and he allowed them to get to that point where they realized their only hope was Jesus

Christ you know he took out every human prop out from under them to where they had to depend on Christ has Jesus ever done that to us he ever done it to you he allowed you to stay in a situation and a circumstance longer than you ever thought because what's our response how do we handle situations in life don't we try to handle it on our own men we're really bad at that we try to we can handle these situations on our own or in America we've got a lot of props don't we whether it be our medical system or insurance or you know one thing or another credit cards we've got all these props propping us up where we try to handle situations and circumstances in our lives and the last place we turn is Jesus and so sometimes

Jesus puts us in circumstances where we can't handle all of our man-made props are ineffective and our only hope is Jesus Christ and he leaves us in that situation and that circumstance until we come to that conclusion and we turn to him completely solely relying on him to step into that situation and if he leaves us there for a little while longer it's okay because we trust him we know that he is working there he's caring for us he's taking care of us and he's teaching us lessons that we need to know to grow in our walk and our faith with him which brings us to our last point he will help us to grow you know I believe that this was the whole purpose of Jesus and the false understanding of who he was but it was also sending him out or sending the disciples out onto the sea to help them to grow in their faith and their trust in him because as I said earlier shortly [31 : 26] Jesus was going to be gone and these men were going to have to trust Jesus was with them even though he wasn't physically in their presence and there may be times when they didn't feel him or they didn't sense his presence but they had to trust that he saw them he knew their situation he knew their circumstances and he would care for them and he was helping their faith to grow deeper and stronger in the midst of all of that you know it's not easy to face storms of life is it and we would never want to face many of the storms we've already faced in life but how many of you have faced storms in your life that when you look back you realize I was never closer to God than when I was in the midst of that storm and there are so many lessons that I learned that helped me grow in my faith and my walk with the

Lord that I never would have learned any other way now if given a choice we'd never walk through that again we'd never want to but God loves us so much and his ultimate purpose is to mold and shape us as Christians is to mold and shape us into the image of Christ and he's willing to put us through some storms of life he's willing to hold our feet to the fire if that's what it takes to help us turn loose of control and give our lives fully and freely to him and trust him to shape us and mold us and help us to be the men and women of faith that he wants us to be let me ask you this morning do you really trust God with your life do you trust him in all situations and all circumstances of life even when it's challenging even when it's difficult even when it's painful even when you don't understand what in the world is going on even when you don't sense his presence with you do you trust him do you trust him enough to just say Lord take my life and use me as you will and may your name be

glorified in the midst of this do you trust God enough even if his will is for you to die are you willing to say Lord my life is yours use me to bring glory and honor to your name well I'm going to ask the musicians to come and lead us in a time of invitation and if the Lord is speaking to you in any way this morning I would encourage you to respond I'd love to pray for you pray with you and if you do not know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior let me encourage you not to go another day without asking Christ you can do it right there in your seat you can come speak to me or you can speak to another believer that you trust but don't go another day without Christ being your Lord of your life you