



**KEEP  
CALM**



**JESUS  
IS IN THE  
BOAT**

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# KEEP CALM JESUS IS IN THE BOAT

It happened on the Sea of Galilee.

We were about to start Day 5 of our Holy Land tour, and already we had seen so much that the mind could not take it all in. We had traveled from Tel Aviv to Mount Carmel and from there to Megiddo in the broad plain of the Jezreel Valley. It will one day be the scene of the last great battle of history—Armageddon.

Eventually we made our way to Nazareth where Jesus grew up. Two thousand years ago it was a tiny village. Today it is a bustling Arab city.

We traveled to Caesarea Philippi where Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter responded, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” As we left the area, it rained on and off for several hours as our day wrapped up with a baptism service in the Jordan River.

And now it was Sunday morning in Tiberius, which was a Roman city in Jesus’ day but is now predominantly Jewish.

## BAD DAY FOR A BOAT RIDE

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Looking out the window, I could see dark clouds rolling across the mountains lining the western shore. It looked like a bad day for a boat ride.

But storm or no storm, no tour would be complete without a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee, so after bundling up to keep warm and dry, we walked to the nearby dock.

As the rain began to fall, we clambered onto the rocking boat, grabbing whatever we could find to keep from falling over. Once we were all safely aboard, the captain gave the signal, and the boat slowly left its mooring.

The skies were slate-gray, with gusts of wind and light rain pelting the boat. As we ventured away from the dock, our guide took pita bread, broke it, and held the fragments out over the side so the seagulls would fly by and take it out of his hand. Then it was our turn. It was unnerving to see a large bird flying right at you, snatching the bread from your fingers.

## THE WIND TUNNEL

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After passing the kibbutz where we saw the “Jesus Boat” the day before, our guide pointed to Mount Arbel. As the largest mountain near the Sea of Galilee, it was easily seen by travelers in all directions. Because of its strategic location, soldiers fought many battles on the rocky slopes and in the caves that honeycomb the mountainside.

A road from Nazareth to Capernaum runs through the valley next to the mountain.

No doubt Jesus walked that road many times.

Because it is lined on both sides by steep mountains, the valley is sometimes called the wind tunnel. Any storm coming from the west would blow through the valley and hit the Sea of Galilee with enormous force.

Thus the lake (that’s really what the Sea of Galilee is—a large lake) might be peaceful, and then a storm would suddenly arise, with driving rain and gale-force winds. Any boat on the lake would be in peril when that happened.

## A ONE-POINT SERMON

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The rain continued to fall intermittently as the wind picked up and then slacked off. We had a brief service on the boat, singing “Holy, Holy, Holy” and “How Great Thou Art.” Then I spoke briefly from Mark 4:35-41. I told them I had a one-point sermon from this familiar story.

*On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him.*

*And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling.*

*But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!”*

*And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.*

*He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?”*

As I read the text, an amazing thing happened that we all noticed. When I read, “And a great windstorm arose,” the wind began to pick up, and the waves rocked the boat.

When I read, “And the wind ceased,” just like that, at that very moment, the wind died down. It was as if the Father in heaven said, “This is how it happened two thousand years ago.”

## WHOSE IDEA WAS IT?

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*The key to understanding this story lies in one crucial question. If you know the answer, then you know what this story is about. If you don't know the answer, or if you skip over it, this story will be lost to you.*

### **Whose idea was it to get into the boat in the first place?**

Go back and read the text. The answer is very plain.

It happened at the end of a long day of ministry. After Jesus and his disciples had spent hours ministering to the needs of people, it was Jesus himself who said, “Let us go across to the other side.”

His disciples were undoubtedly glad to hear those words because they were exhausted. Mark 4:1-2 says Jesus had to get in a boat to teach the vast crowd that pressed against the water's edge.

It had been like that everywhere they went.

Crowds came to hear the Master. Sick people came to be healed. The confused came to find hope. On and on they came, day after day, wanting to hear Jesus, desperately wanting to be near him.

*Helping hurting people, if you really care about them, will cost you everything you have.*

Serving others takes a toll on the spirit. We've all gone to bed at night weary from phone calls and meetings and trying to solve difficult problems. We want nothing more than a good night's rest. When you have given all you have, rest is what you need.

## WHEN GOD GOES TO SLEEP

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Jesus himself is weary.

That shouldn't surprise us because he was fully human. As a man, he got tired and hungry and thirsty. That's why he laid down on a cushion and went to sleep. Although he created sleep, he now uses it to regain his strength.

I'm sure the disciples were glad to hear they were going to the other side of the lake. Several of them were fishermen who knew the Sea of Galilee intimately.

Jesus loved this area and worked many miracles there. He made his headquarters in Capernaum, a little fishing village on the northern shore. On one of the nearby hillsides, he gave the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Somewhere in that region, he fed 5000 men with five loaves and two fish.

That night the skies promised smooth sailing from the west to the east. Having made that journey in their fishing boats many times, the men looked forward to a few hours of easy sailing.

## WHEN THE STORM HITS

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No one worried about the weather. After all, at least four of the disciples were fishermen—James, John, Peter, and Andrew. If anything happened that night, surely they could handle it.

They got off to a good start.

As the boat left the western shore, the lake was so calm that Jesus decided to sleep in the stern, resting on a cushion. Suddenly a great storm arose, the wind rushing down the mountains and through the valley by Mount Arbel, whipping up the waves and causing them to come crashing into the boat.

The water rushed in faster than the disciples could bail it out. The little fishing boat bobbed like a cork as wave after wave crashed into it. Nothing could be more terrifying than to be on a boat in the darkness as it takes on water and slowly begins to sink.

It was as if a hurricane had hit the Sea of Galilee.

Where did this storm come from?

God sent it!

**“He walks on the sea”** (Job 9:8).

**“For I am the Lord your God, who stirs up the sea and its waves roar”** (Isaiah 51:15).

That brings us to an important truth. *The wind always blows around us. The mighty storm comes sooner or later.* We have no choice or control over when the storm comes.

Today the sun may be shine; tomorrow we may find ourselves toiling against the wind and rain, tossed about by adversity.

*Life can turn on a dime.* We all know that.

It could be good news:

“We’re getting married.”

“The house just sold.”

“I’m graduating next week.”

“You’re hired.”

Or it could be bad:

“We arrested your son.”

“The tumor is malignant.”

“You’re fired.”

“I’m leaving.”

We never know what tomorrow may bring.

Let’s go back to the basic question:

Who told them to get in the boat? Jesus.

Who’s sleeping in the boat during the storm? Jesus.

*This is the only time the Bible mentions Jesus sleeping.* He somehow slept through the storm. I’m not like that. Even when things are calm, I’m up and down all night long.

## “LORD, DON’T YOU CARE?”

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In desperation, the disciples woke Jesus up.

They asked him a question that may seem impertinent, but it is one we have all asked at one time or another: “Don’t you care that we are perishing?”

Lord Jesus, don’t you care that my child is sick?

Lord Jesus, don’t you care that my marriage is falling apart?

Lord Jesus, don’t you care that my friends have deserted me?

Lord Jesus, don’t you care that I have no money?

Lord Jesus, don’t you care that I feel so alone?

Lord Jesus, don’t you care that I want to give up?

Lord Jesus, don’t you care that my husband has died?

Lord Jesus, don’t you care that I lost my job?

We have all asked that question in a million ways a million times. *We never question the Lord’s compassion when things are going well.* But God’s compassion is not measured by our circumstances, nor is his kindness limited to our understanding.

Perhaps you’ve heard it put this way:

*You’ll never know if Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have.*

*But when Jesus is all you have, then you will know Jesus is all you need.*

The disciples are about to discover that even amid the raging storm, Jesus is all they need.

God cares just as much when the tempest is raging as when the seas are calm and the sun is shining. His mercy is not limited to the sunlight or the stillness of the waves.

That leads to another question: “Is Jesus still the Lord when he is asleep?” The disciples are not sure, which is why they woke him up.

There were two storms that night:

One on the lake.

One in the hearts of the disciples.

When he awoke, Jesus spoke three words: **“Peace, be still!”** Eugene Peterson offers this colorful paraphrase: **“Awake now, he told the wind to pipe down and said to the sea, ‘Quiet! Settle down!’**

He rebuked the storm the way you would speak to an overzealous puppy: “Back to your kennel.”

And just like that the storm ended.

Jesus speaks—and the storm stops.

It has to!

The wind must obey.

The waves must obey.

They have no choice.

They recognized their Master’s voice!

Millions of gallons of water cease their motion.

Gale force winds stop in an instant.

This story offers us a wonderful picture of Jesus.

He is so human that he must sleep.

He is so divine that he puts the storm to sleep!

This miracle fulfills Psalm 107:29:

***He caused the storm to be still, so that the waves of the sea were hushed.***



## “HAVE YOU STILL NO FAITH?”

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*Jesus rebuked the storm—not the terrified disciples.*

To them he simply said, “**Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?**” Implicit in those words is a lesson we all need to learn.

The disciples were afraid because they were men who were used to being in control of life. They knew how to handle hard situations. There wasn't a weakling among them. And yet, in a life-threatening crisis beyond their control, their faith turned to fear.

Instead of putting them down, Jesus simply says, “Have you still no faith?” The answer is yes and no. They had faith in Jesus. They truly believed in him. But their faith, though real, was not yet full-grown.

How do you get the faith that enables you to survive the storms of life? *The only answer is to get in the boat with Jesus and ride with him wherever he wants to go.*

Where there are no storms, there is no danger.

Where there is no danger, there is no fear.

Where there is no fear, there is no testing.

Where there is no testing, there is no learning.

Where there is no learning, there is no growing.

Where there is no growing, there is no faith.

Here is the shorthand version:

Where there are no storms, there is no faith.

No storms, no faith.

Few storms, a little faith.

Many storms, much faith.

## NO SHORTCUTS

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There are moments in life when we can be in control or we can grow, but we can't do both.

Getting in the boat with Jesus means giving up our right to be in control.

There are no shortcuts along the pathway of spiritual growth.

The storms of life are not a detour.

They are not a mistake.  
They are not a trick or a trap.  
They are not sent to destroy you.

God sends the storms so you will cry out to the Lord in utter desperation, “Don’t you care that I am perishing?”

At that moment—not before it, but in it, when the water seems about to engulf you and all that is dear to you is lost—the Lord rises and says, “Peace, be still!”

Let me repeat it one more time. Who told them to get in the boat in the first place? Jesus. *It was his idea all along.*

Did he know about the storm in advance? Of course, he did. And he told them to get in the boat anyway.

Did he warn them in advance? No, because that would have ruined the lesson they needed to learn.

They got in the storm because they got in the boat.

They got in the boat because they followed Jesus!

What did they learn that night?

They learned about his power: The wind and the waves obey him.

They learned about his promise: They made it to the other side.

They learned about his presence: They were safe in the storm.

## WHEN LIFE TUMBLES IN

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We all have moments when we feel utterly alone and forgotten by God. When life tumbles in around us, even after trying to serve God to the best of our ability, there are moments when we feel God has left us.

We can’t always avoid those moments of utter despair.

Sometimes we bring them on ourselves by the choices we make.

Sometimes they come because we have done what the Lord told us to do.

Sometimes the storms of life seem to come out of nowhere.

## THE CHOICE WE MUST MAKE

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In those moments we have a choice to make.

Either we choose to believe the Lord sent the storm for his own purposes, or we conclude the Lord has abandoned us.

We can't manipulate God into avoiding the storms or suddenly making them disappear. *If anything, this story teaches us precisely the opposite.*

Sometimes our path takes us into the storm. Sometimes we see the clouds gathering and know it is coming. But more often, the winds rise up and our life, which had been so well-planned, turns upside down. And we begin to sink beneath the waves.

## THE LESSON WE MUST LEARN

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Jesus is the Lord of the wind and the waves.

When he calls us, we get into the boat.

When he sleeps, we toil on.

When the storm comes, we cry out to him.

When he awakes, he calms the storm.

When the storm is over, our faith is stronger.

Here's a lesson we must learn: *The storm won't last, and the boat won't sink.*

Are you in a storm at this very moment? *You are not there by accident but by your Father's design.* He does not intend to hurt you even though you feel like screaming because your pain is so great.

You are not alone though it feels that way. You may have lost everything, but you have not lost the Lord. He is still with you though you cannot see him or sense his presence.

Fear not.

Keep believing.

The Master of the sea is by your side.

When the time has come, he will say, "Peace, be still," and the storm will run out of breath, and the sea will become like glass. *Eventually the day will break, and you will see the sun shining again.* Looking back, you will see that your faith has grown stronger by the storm you passed through.

## WHO IS JESUS?

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But note the question the disciples asked once the storm was past.

“Who then is this?”

That’s always the question, isn’t it?

Jesus never performs miracles like a circus magician. He never uses his power simply to wow the crowd. Instead, he reveals his divine power so we will come face to face with the inevitable question:

Who is this man?

We all must answer that question.

Who is Jesus?

He’s the Son of God from heaven.

That’s why the wind and the waves obey him. He is the Lord of nature because he created the wind and the waves. They must obey him because he is the Master of the universe.

## WHEN CHRIST IS IN THE BOAT

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I ran across a message by German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer called “Overcoming Fear.” He preached it fifteen days before Hitler came to power in 1933. Bonhoeffer took as his text the story of Jesus calming the sea.

At one point, he makes the following observation: “When Christ is in the boat, a storm always comes up.”

That sentence got my attention. We tend to think if Christ is with us, things will go smoothly.

Wrong.

*Jesus knew all about the storm before the disciples got into the boat. He went to sleep knowing the storm would soon arrive. We shouldn’t expect an easy ride when we follow Christ. I ran across this quote from Robert Coleman that made me stop and think:*

*Following Jesus seemed easy enough at first, but that was because they had not followed him very far.*

When Christ is in the boat, a storm always comes up.  
Is Christ in your boat today?

Is he traveling with you, walking with you, present with you?

Good.

Get ready for trouble.

*Jesus can still the storm, but he stirs it up first.*

What a Christ we serve!

Even the winds and waves obey him!

Keep calm.

Jesus is in the boat.

***Lord Jesus, increase my faith in you even when the waves rise and my little boat is about to sink. Amen.***

# GOING DEEPER

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1. What would you do if you had absolutely no fear?
2. If Jesus knew the storm was coming, why did he tell his disciples to get into the boat?
3. Why is giving up control of your life so difficult?
4. What “storms” has Jesus brought you through?
5. In what part of your life do you need to remember that “the storm won’t last, and the boat won’t sink”?

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