

PEACE, BE STILL

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on August 28, 1966 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

In the final paragraph of the fourth chapter of the gospel of Mark, we enter the story of Christ's life just after he had presented a series of parables concerning the kingdom of heaven, and just before he performed four significant miracles. These miracles demonstrated Christ's power in four different areas--over nature, over demons, over disease, and even over death. Let us look carefully at the account of the first of these miracles.

“And on that day, when even was come, he saith unto them, Let us go over unto the other side. And leaving the multitude, they take him with them, even as he was, in the boat. And other boats were with him. And there ariseth a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the boat, insomuch that the boat was now filling. And he himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion: and they awake him, and say unto him, Teacher, carest thou not that we perish? And he awoke, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind cease, and there was a great calm. And he said unto them, Why are ye fearful? Have ye not yet faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’” (Mark.4:35-41).

Analysis of the Text

The opening sentence of our text indicates that Christ had spent a day in teaching the multitudes. When evening had come he wished to depart from the populous western side of the Sea of Galilee in the area of Capernaum, and go to the quiet eastern side. We would call special attention to his expression, “Let us go ...” These words were often on Christ's lips. He was not content with “home keeping” but was “restless” to be going about his Father's business. Over and over again in the narrative we find him saying, “Let us go ...” As Christians, we also must “go over unto the other side.” In our day this means go over to the other side of the oceans, carrying the gospel to those who are in darkness. It means that we are to go over into other areas where human beings have special needs, such as sickness, poverty, and the like. It means that we are to go over to the other side in facing many of mankind's great problems which press in upon us in our day. We, too, need to be up and doing in the Lord's work.

Our text next mentions the “multitudes.” Christ could gather a crowd anywhere and at any time. The common people heard him gladly, and even those of high station often came long distances to hear him teach, and to watch him in the working of his miracles. But, just as he was able to draw a crowd, he also often had to leave the multitude--in order to rest, to recuperate and to pray. This is one of those occasions.

We next read, “And there ariseth a great storm of wind.” The Sea of Galilee is approximately 650 feet below sea level and because of this unusual situation it is especially subject to quick, violent storms. In 1879 J. W. McGarvey made a trip to Palestine which resulted in the writing of his *Lands of the Bible*. On page 519 of this book he tells of finishing a day's study on the east side of the sea at about five o'clock in the afternoon, and of suggesting to his dragoman and to the boatman that they return to Tiberias, about an hour's journey across the southern end of the sea. The Arab boatmen looked at the sky and then talked excitedly. Although Brother McGarvey could see no sign of any storm, these seasoned boatmen saw warnings that a storm was about to strike. They entered the boats and instead of going directly across the sea they started rowing toward the north end of the sea, at right angles to the desired course. Within minutes the storm had struck and they were hard pressed to make the shore. They anchored for some time near the old site of the city of Bethsaida, then moved close in shore to a point just below Capernaum, where they then waited several hours until the sea had calmed. It was not until nearly two o'clock in the morning that they were able to reach their destination of Tiberias. It must have been something of this kind of storm that suddenly plunged the sea into violence on that night in the long ago when Jesus and a few of his disciples put out in their boat.

Our text tells us that, “He himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion.” This would be the only place in a small boat where one might lie down for rest. It is likely that the cushion was simply a fleece of wool, which became a good pillow when rolled up. As we read this story we see an indication of Christ's great confidence and serenity. While the others were distressed he was asleep. Mark repeatedly presents Christ as teaching, exercising and demonstrating trust in God. This is just another such occasion.

When Jesus had awakened, he addressed the storm with his classic, often quoted expression, “Peace, be still.” The wind and the waves obeyed his command, and soon the lake was again calm and safe. In writing of this event Mark seems to be conveying the reassuring truth that in performing this miracle Christ was saying that he who could save his disciples from the storm could also save other disciples whenever they might be in need. It is most comforting to know that we have a God and a Savior who have the ability to care for all of us.

Phillips Brooks preached one of his greatest sermons on this theme of Christ's stilling the storms of life. Like the Sea of Galilee which was churned by great storms, our lives are also churned by great storms. Think for a moment of the greatest stress in your own life, or

in the lives of your dearest loved ones, or in the lives of men in general. These stresses may be physical, or emotional, or financial, or moral, or ethical, or religious. In all of these turbulent areas Christ can bring peace and calm.

In his letter to the Philippians, the apostle Paul indicated his own inner peace that came through his relationship with Christ, when he said, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound: in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me." (Phil. 4:11-13). We are also reminded of that famous statement which we read in Daniel 3:17, where Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the three Hebrew young men, when facing the apparently inescapable death of the fiery furnace said, "Our God is able to deliver us from this burning, fiery, furnace." We, too, believe that our God is able to calm whatever storms and stresses may come in our lives.

Jesus then turned to his disciples and said, "Why are ye fearful?" In his sermon on the mount Jesus had said, "Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment? But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matt. 6:25,33). Similar words are found in the Philippian letter from which we read a moment ago, "In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:6-7).

Noel Coward's famous play, "Design for Living," has the characters talk about the many marvelous inventions in this magical age in which we live. Then, one of the characters says, "But nothing has been invented to create quiet and calm." How true this is. Only in the Lord do we find the inner peace and quiet so desired in our day. We also remember the words of Paul in Rom. 8:28, "And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose."

Our text closes as the disciples in the boat ask, "Who then is this? So far as the disciples were concerned, the point of greatest emphasis in this miracle was not some teaching or saying of Jesus, not even his faith and courage in the midst of danger, not even the miracle itself, Christ's remarkable power in making a stormy sea calm, but rather the point of emphasis for them was what this event demonstrated about Christ. It was not the miracle but what it proved that was paramount in their thinking. Surely one who could calm the sea must be the divine Son of God, and must be able to care for all of those who are his.

Conclusion

Today, we see all of these meanings, for this is a many-sided event. We are impressed with the calm confidence which our Lord possessed in time of emergency. We are also impressed with his great power in stilling the stormy seas. We are convinced that he can care for us when we are in need. Perhaps the words of the writer of the Hebrew letter can form a conclusion to this story, "Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need." (Heb. 4:16).

Let us draw near to the Lord while we have time and opportunity, so he will be near to us when we have need. Come to Christ, confessing your faith in him as the Son of God, repenting of your past sins, and then be baptized for the remission of your sins. As you rise from this symbolic re-enactment of the burial and resurrection of the Lord, you enter into a new life, one guided by the Lord and one in which you will be protected by the Lord. We invite you to come, as we sing the Lord's invitation.