

Dear Friends in Christ,

I don't apologize for the times I take brothers and sisters battling affliction - most in the hospital or nursing home - taking them to the 4th verse of Psalm 23: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death..." And I stop there - because that's where we exist on earth. We might have a lot of wonderful, sunny moments, but they will end. We exist in a sunken place and the shadow of death looms there. The Holy Spirit teaches us to say, "I walk through the valley..." "I'm passing through."

And I am always compelled to direct them, as well as you and me, to the 6th verse of Psalm 23: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." David isn't talking about an inherent goodness and mercy of this world. He's talking about the goodness and mercy of God that leads to Jesus, and Jesus, the Good Shepherd, leads us to The House of The Lord - Heaven!

Regarding the fact that this earth isn't our home, I've quoted the following several times over the years. I cannot escape how increasingly significant the truth of it has become; from Vance Havener: "Trying to get this (*the fact that this earth isn't our home*) across to the average Sunday morning congregation of American church members is almost hopeless, for no generation has ever driven down its tent pegs in this world as we have done."

So, here we go . . .

ANOTHER STORMY BOAT RIDE? IS THIS REALLY NECESSARY?

I. The First Question.

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. (vv. 22-24)

The first question of our theme is ANOTHER STORMY BOAT RIDE? And I'm posing that question because we have been on this particular boat ride with the disciples many times over the years. The answer to the question is yes. The reality is that stormy boat rides for God's people thread their way through all Scripture and our lives.

It would be fair to say that Adam and Eve were confronted with a long, long life of horrible realities about a sinful, fallen world. Besides the shame, the blame game, the lying and impending dying and death that would follow them on their way out of the Garden, they would ultimately meet the words, "Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him." (Gen. 4:b) And life didn't get any better!

The stormy boat rides continued with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, the Judges, David, Solomon, the Prophets, the Apostles, the New Testament Church, your life, my life, and will continue for those to come. The pastors think about this every time we go to the hospital, the nursing home, or have a funeral, or listen to one of our brothers and sisters (most sitting here) break the news of a troubled moment, and as we examine the history of the persecuted church. The question isn't, "Why is this happening to me?" The question is, "Why would I expects something different?"

II. The Worst Boat Ride.

I'm thinking it's been about 8 months ago when I received a copy of an item written by Albert Mohler entitled "The Osteen Predicament - Mere Happiness Cannot Bear the Weight of the Gospel." It is, of course, about the "ministry" of Joel Osteen. Albert Mohler is the President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. I ask you to listen carefully, because this will

connect the first question, “Another stormy boat ride?” to the second question, “Is this really necessary?” Over these past years your pastors have addressed Mohler’s insights. It’s good to hear it from others. He wrote:

According to Osteen, God wants to pour out his “immeasurable favor” on his human creatures, and this requires a fundamental re-ordering of our thinking. (He then quotes Osteen) “To experience this immeasurable favor you must rid yourself of that small-minded thinking and start expecting God’s blessings, start anticipating promotion and supernatural increase. You must conceive it in your heart before you can receive it. In other words, you must make increase in your own thinking, then God will bring those things to pass.”

Mohler then states: “Just consider the fact that most Christians throughout the history of the church have been poor, and often desperately poor.” And then this: “What about all those who are even now suffering persecution for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?” Earlier in the article, Mohler stated concerning the Osteens, who I understand are now divorced:

America deserves the Osteens. The consumer culture, the cult of the therapeutic, the marketing impulse, and the sheer superficiality of American cultural Christianity probably made the Osteens inevitable. The Osteens are phenomenally successful because they are the exaggerated fulfillment of the self-help movement and the cult of celebrity rolled into one massive mega-church media empire. And, to cap it all off, they give Americans what Americans crave - reassurance delivered with a smile.

And one last thought here. Mohler said, “The divine-human relationship is just turned upside down, and God’s greatest desire is said to be our happiness (earthly, of course).” His observation is correct and what it says incorporates the incredible line-up of false prophets and charlatans of the day. The Contemporary Church Growth Movement, which has infested much of the church today, flirts and toys with the same thinking: “God’s greatest desire is...our (earthly) happiness.” Give the people what they want. Do whatever to attract and draw people. Keep the teachings of Scripture up-beat and avoid, or minimize, the controversial teachings. The conservative, confessing church is persistently an object of scorn and ridicule by the world and the apostate church. But, then again, Jesus warned, “And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.” (Matt. 24:11) What Osteen and the many, many others represent is THE WORST BOAT RIDE. It perverts the truths of God’s Word and minimizes, or ignores, the salient issues of sin, death and eternal separation from God.

III. Is This Really Necessary?

And so, the second question of our theme: IS THIS (the stormy boat ride) REALLY NECESSARY? And the answer is simple: Yes!

And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified and said, ‘It’s a ghost!’ And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.’” (vv. 25-27)

What you want to remember here are the opening words of our text: “...he (Jesus) made them get into the boat.” (v. 22) And this: “...he (Jesus) went up on the mountain to pray.” (v. 23) The storm was no accident. He **made** them get in the boat and **left them alone** (at least it seemed that way). It fits everything Scriptures teach:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith (that is, God pronounces us not guilty and removes the condemnation of our sin.), we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (God forgives us and directs us to eternal life through faith in Christ). Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God (the face to face, forever and ever presence of God's love and eternal life. And the stormy part? Listen:) "Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character, and character produces hope...because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." (Rom. 5:3-5)

The sufferings we experience, the stormy boat rides, draw us to Christ - pull us away from being so horribly distracted by this horribly distracting world which is passing away! As Paul stated, **suffering produces** - good things. They keep the focus sharp! It is as Peter writes, "...now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith...may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." (I Peter 1:6-7 NIV, 1978)

And here's the point; here's the issue; here is why Jesus Christ, God in the flesh came into this world and our lives - **this and this alone!!** "For you are receiving the goal of your faith (The goal. And it isn't happiness here!), the salvation of your souls." (I Peter 1:9 NIV, 1978)

Friends, if we're expecting a life of prosperity and uninterrupted joy and happiness from this world, then we had better re-visit our expectations. We need to examine our faith and knowledge of Scripture. And to do so quickly! God help us!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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St. Matthew 14:22-33: ***“Another Stormy Boat Ride?
Is This Really Necessary?”***

I. The First Question.

II. The Worst Boat Ride.

III. Is This Really Necessary?

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