

Date: November 15, 2009

Title: Are You Prepared for the Storm?

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Scripture:

**James 1:2-8 (NLT)** <sup>2</sup> Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. <sup>3</sup> For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. <sup>4</sup> So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. <sup>5</sup> If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. <sup>6</sup> But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. <sup>8</sup> Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do.

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Today, I want to ask you to begin by remembering a challenging time in your life. This might be the challenge that you are facing right now or it might be something that happened several months or years ago. Now, I want to ask you, did any of you ever ask the question, "Why is this happening to me?" If you did ask that question I can assure you that you are not alone. I think the question why is built into the human psyche. We find ourselves in a struggle and the first thing we want to know is why is this happening.

Now, there could be several reasons for this question. We could be asking this question hoping that an answer will help us steer clear of letting it

happen again. Or we could be concerned with assigning blame or responsibility so we can steer clear of associating with those who are to blame for the trouble. But whatever the reason, you might have to ask why, I would like to suggest that there is a better and more appropriate question to ask and that is this: How am I going to navigate through this challenge most effectively?

I don't know if you have noticed, but as much as my mind wants to come up with the **why** answers, what is really most helpful to any given situation is not so much the **why** answers but the **how** answers. **Why** questions and answers might be able to help with the **how** questions and answers, but beyond that they are not going to do much for us.

In our scripture for this morning I think that James is providing us some useful answers to the question, *How do I deal with this difficulty in my life?* James' answer is simply this: Rejoice, Ask for wisdom, and Trust God. and I am convinced that of these three responses to trouble, the most important one is that last; Trust God. This is the anchor that gives us direction and stability no matter what is going on around us.

James says, *"Be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind."*

Isn't that a great word picture? I mean you can just picture a wave being tossed too and fro across the surface of the sea, can't you. Can you also envision a boat being tossed to and fro across the surface of the ocean? I suspect you most of you have seen movies that depict a sailboat or a clipper ship at sea being tossed about in a storm. I don't know a lot about

sailing a boat. I have done it a few times. I have also read a few books about small sail boats navigating a major ocean. When they get to a storm they often take down the sails so the boat doesn't get blown over by the sail and then they bob around on top of the waves going this way and that.

The rudder that usually steers the boat is useless without the sails or the engine pushing the boat forward. So, the crew would put out what they call a sea anchor. This is sort of like a parachute that is tied to the front of the boat and thrown in the water. It opens up and as the boat is blown by the wind, the bow always faces into the wind and slices head-on into the waves as they blow past. This anchor has saved many a ship from getting toppled over by the waves in a storm. I went on line and found these testimonials of people who had used a particular kind of sea anchor in a storm. Here is what two people wrote about their experiences:

*"We're alive! Thanks to the parachute [Sea] anchor which secured us for 53 hours in Cyclone Justin..."*

*"The sea anchor definitely saved the boat and I'm sure our lives. It operated flawlessly on those two days [985mb storm] and the other three days during the other two gales ... We did what should have been done and came through a very violent storm and survived with no damage. Thank you again for everything."*

There were a lot more than these, but what these folks were saying is that the sea anchor made it possible for them to survive what might have been a fatal storm without it.

What I am suggesting is that our faith in Christ is like a rope tied to a sea anchor. Think of God as an anchor that contains truth and wisdom. When

we are tied to that anchor by faith that is strong, even in the most difficult storms, we naturally get turned in such a way as to line up facing the anchor. Even in a storm, we are able to focus and take strength and courage from one that offers true wisdom and strength to face life's challenges.

And what a blessing that is, in this world that offers so much information and persuasion; much of it conflicting and contradictory. We are constantly bombarded with the opinions of everyone from Ann Landers and Oprah Winfrey to Rush Limbaugh and Lou Dobbs, just to name a few. Our friends and family can also be part of the barrage that tries to influence us as we do our best to navigate through the events and storms of our lives. With all of this information and differing opinions coming at us we can easily get confused and frustrated with life in general. A solid faith in Christ gives us bearing and helps us sort through the myriad of opinions and emotions that we can experience in the midst of challenging times.

Now, I wish I could say to you, "So, it's as simple as that. Just believe in Jesus and all will be well." In theory, that may be true, but how helpful is that, really? I mean, imagine someone waste deep in a river surrounded by alligators and someone calls out to them, "Trust in Jesus and you'll be fine." That is probably not a lot of help to the person facing the alligators.

And I think that our scripture can come across that way too. James says, "*When troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.*" I actually read this scripture to someone the other day and the reply was, "I get the concept." Of course, we all get the concept intellectually, don't we? But how do we get the concept enough so that when we really

need it, in the middle of a storm, it is more than just a slightly annoying platitude? For that matter, how do any of our Holy Scriptures become tangible **how** answers for us in time of need?

For this question, I wish I had a better answer than I do. I wish I could hook a person up to a faith diagnostic machine like an x-ray or CAT scan that would show just what he or she needed to develop a strong faith so I could write out a prescription. I might be able to help with some suggestions, but generally speaking, the best I can advise is to do what millions of Christians have been doing for since Jesus' time; you **practice your faith**.

Really, just practice. What I suggest is that you:

- **Practice praying** so that when you really need to talk to God it is not a strange and unusual experience.
- **Practice reading scripture** and pondering how your life fits into the Biblical story so that you will be able to recognize how your life and situation might be comparable to that of biblical characters and situations.
- **Practice sharing** your faith with others either with words or with actions.
- And perhaps the most difficult of all, **practice trusting God** in all things. We need to practice trusting God even in the little squalls of life so that when the big storms come, we have some practical knowledge of how God can be at work in our lives even when we don't see evidence of it.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement in England told of the experience of crossing the Atlantic Ocean by clipper ship when a very large storm threatened to capsize or break the ship apart. On board was a group of Moravian Christians who calmly prayed and sang hymns during the

storm as if they were in not danger at all. John Wesley was terrified for his life and when they safely returned to England he began to seek more than the intellectual knowledge that had previously been the strength of his faith. He did all he could to develop his faith so that he too would be able to trust God like the Moravians had. John Wesley practiced his faith more diligently than most, and still he discovered that he needed more practice.

My guess is that if you are like me and like John Wesley, you probably could use more practice too. I'm pretty convinced that the words of James and other similar passages of scripture will be of the most value when we, living in the midst of the storm have some experience with the truth of those words. I believe it is quite possible that without consistent practice and faith development, much of the value of biblical truth will not be available to us when we need it most.

But this doesn't just apply to ships at sea. Imagine that you just lost your job and you don't know how in the world you are going to make ends meet. A friend trying to be helpful says, "Hey, you know what James says, 'when troubles come your way consider it an opportunity for great joy.'" And you look at your friend and think, "Get out of my face. You are not helping."

But then imagine another scenario: You have just lost your job and the first place you turn is to the scripture because you have experienced the truth of God's word before. In this case, when you come across James' words of encouragement they have meaning and they resonate with other times you have experienced hardship and found God to be ever-present and faithful. You are able to remember just how much your faith grew during those troubled times and how as it turns out, God was always there even though you didn't always recognize his presence.

Earlier, I compared our faith to a rope tied to a sea anchor. In this analogy, God is obviously the sea anchor, we are the ship, and our faith is the rope. If we were to use a thin little piece of twine to connect to the anchor you can see how it might easily break. The best anchor in the world will not save you in a storm unless the rope is strong enough to keep you securely fastened.

Folks, our faith is the rope that keeps us tethered to God in the storms of life. The condition of that rope is vital to our survival. Without a strong rope of faith, we are constantly at risk of drifting aimlessly at the mercy of whatever wind the world blows in our direction.

So let me ask you, what condition is your rope in? Is it too thin to stand up to the challenges that lie ahead? Or is it plenty thick but frayed in places by questions and doubts that you haven't addressed? Do you have a consistent maintenance schedule that will insure your continued connection to God no matter what?

What I would like to suggest is that a storm is coming. I'm not sure why or from where, but a storm is coming. The question you might want to ask yourself is this: Do I really know **how** I will get through the storm? Is my faith strong enough and resilient enough to see me through it? I suspect none of us knows the answer for sure until we are faced with the situation, but I hope you will accept the invitation to do all you can to prepare. If John Wesley needed it, I guess most likely most of us need it too. So, let's all of us practice, practice, practice. Amen.