

Surviving the Storms of Life

Sterling UMC
June 13, 2010
Mark 4:35-41

Sparky the Parakeet never saw it coming. One second he was peacefully perched in his cage. The next he was sucked in, washed up, and blown over.

The problems began when Sparky's owner decided to clean his cage with a vacuum cleaner. She removed the attachment from the end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. The phone rang, and she turned to pick it up. She'd barely said "hello" when "sssopp!" Sparky got sucked in.

The bird owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum, and opened the bag. There was Sparky - still alive, but stunned.

Since the bird was covered with dust and soot, she grabbed him and raced to the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and held Sparky under the running water. Then, realizing that Sparky was soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do... she reached for the hair dryer and blasted the pet with hot air.

Poor Sparky never knew what hit him.

A few days after the trauma, the reporter who'd initially written about the event contacted Sparky's owner to see how the bird was recovering. "Well," she replied, "Sparky doesn't sing much anymore - he just sits and stares."

It's hard not to see why. Sucked in, washed up, and blown over . . . that's enough to steal the song from the stoutest heart.

Can you relate to Sparky? Most of us can. One minute you're seated in familiar territory with a song on your lips, then Sssopp! You're sucked into a black cavern of uncertainty, doused with the cold water of reality, and stung with the hot air of empty promises.

Life has gone from calm to chaos. The life that had been so calm is now so stormy.

If so, if Sparky's story is your story, then take comfort my friends, because you are not alone. We all face our own private storms that strike without warning and with great force. Not one of us is immune. We all experience them. They come in many varieties and degrees of intensity, from minor irritations to major catastrophes.

The boss calls you into his office, "I'm sorry, but we're going to have to let you go."

The doctor calls with the test results, "I'm afraid our news is not very good."

A letter arrives from a lawyer, "Your spouse wants a divorce."

A policeman knocks on your door, "I'm sorry, but there's been a terrible accident."

The phone rings, "Someone you know and love has suddenly taken their own life."

And the list goes on and on.

Suddenly we find ourselves in the teeth of life's storms. And we wonder, "Where is God when I need him? Why would he allow something like this to happen? Why has

he abandoned me? What have I done to deserve this? I'm hurting. I'm in pain. I'm alone. I'm angry. Where is the Lord?"

I wonder if this is how Jesus' disciples felt that night on the sea.

The Sea of Galilee is actually known for fast moving storms. It sits 600 feet below sea level and is surrounded by hills and mountains. Often storms very suddenly and very violently blow down onto the Sea of Galilee without warning. On this occasion the sun had scarcely set before typhoon-like winds began to roar. And the disciples suddenly find themselves in the jaws of an angry storm.

Imagine the incredible strain of bouncing from wave to wave in a tiny fishing vessel. These experienced watermen are scared - The water is breaking over the bow and the boat is filling up with water - they're sinking and they know it. They also know that they are too far from shore to survive this storm and they know that this could be it for them. How do you survive when a storm like this threatens your life, your family, your peace of mind, your home?

There are two things that I want to say to you this morning as we conclude our series on Building Strong Families I want us to look at how we can survive these storms. Two things that I believe are absolutely essential so that our families can weather these storms and not be completely blown away or blown apart when they strike.

The first thing is this: Make sure Jesus is in your boat.

In this story it is very interesting that:

Where was Jesus? He was asleep in the stern of the boat.

The disciples should have known this. This should have given the disciples confidence in the midst of the storm. Jesus was with them (God in the flesh). They had already seen what he was capable of through his miracles and ministry. But some reason they just could equate his abilities into their circumstances. How often are we like those disciples?

We are safer in the storm with Jesus in our boat, than in the calm without him.

Here are some things that I can assure you of from scripture today.

When you face the greatest storms of life:

a. God knows and cares about what is going on in your life.

Matthew 10:29-31 tells us: *29 What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin*? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. 30 And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. 31 So don't be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.*

b. God knows how you feel

He knows what you are going through. Remember, he has walked the face of this planet and he has gone through every human emotion, every disappointment, every bit of sadness, and every type of joy that we have faced. **Hebrews 4:15-16** tells us: *15 This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testing's we do, yet he did not sin. 16 So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.*

c. God wants to work in your storm

We read Jesus' words in **Matthew 23:37**: *37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God's messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn't let me."*

How does God work in the midst of our storms? God's power to still the storm is manifested in two different ways in life:

1. Sometimes God Stills the Storm

Like this day sometimes God miraculously intervenes in the course of events, suspends the laws of nature and the universe and accomplishes His deliverance. We have seen it biblically in the crossing of the Red Sea, the plagues of Egypt, the crossing of the Jordan, the defeat of Jericho, the deliverance of Peter from prison and the list goes on and on. We have seen it in our own lives as God has healed the sick, delivered the addicted and repaired broken homes.

2. Sometimes God Stills His People in the midst of storm

Peter went through his shipwreck, Paul was beaten and stoned, John was exiled to Patmos, but always God was faithful. Many of you can testify today that God has seen you through storms that could have ended your life or marriage. God has walked with you through winds and waves that threatened to sink your ship. David certainly knew what he was writing when inspired by the Spirit of God he penned the words of the Lord's prayer he wrote in **Psalms 23:4**: *4 Even when I walk through the darkest valley (the shadow of death),* I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.*

The second thing that we need to remember is to make sure you build a strong foundation.

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." (Matthew 7:24-27)

The picture is pretty clear. In a storm, a house without a solid foundation is going to get knocked down. There are three things we should learn from this parable,

EVERYONE IS BUILDING ON SOME KIND OF FOUNDATION

Everyone is building their life on some kind of foundation. There are only two choices: you either build on a solid and deep foundation or you build on a shallow and weak foundation: one that will withstand the storms and one that will not. The picture is clear. You are either walking God's way, experiencing His transformation in your life, and knowing His strength for difficult times; or you are walking away from God, producing nothing of eternal value and are vulnerable to the storms that may come your way. You are one or the other. Which one do you think you are?

TIMES OF TESTING REVEAL THE FOUNDATION ON WHICH WE HAVE BUILT

This parable gives every indication that before the storms came these two houses looked identical. They may have both been attractive, spacious, and comfortable. On the surface you couldn't really tell which house was built on the sand and which was anchored deep to the rock. It was only when the storms hit that you could see the difference in the homes.

So it will be with those around us. It is impossible for us to tell who is genuine in their faith and who is not until the time of trial comes. You and I both know that this is true. Everybody sounds like a believer when times are good. When God is giving us what we want, we are all cheering for Him. True faith comes when we are called to trust Him in the dark. When a person faces loss, or disappointment, or things simply don't go as expected, we get to see what their faith is really made of. The person who has a deep foundation,

- Trusts God's wisdom when life is confusing
- Relies on God's strength when they are weak
- Looks beyond the present heartache to God's purpose and eternal glory
- Relies on grace in times of personal failure
- Runs TO God rather than away from Him

So, knowing all of this, why don't more people build on the firm foundation? There are several reasons.

They are lazy

How appealing it is to build on the sand. It's a good location. It is adequate. It is easy. Who wants to dig down deep if you don't have to? It takes more work to build on the rock. It takes more time and energy. And it costs more. It is easier and faster to build on the sand.

It is easier to take shortcuts in building a home. It is cheaper to use lesser materials. And for awhile, no one may notice. But somewhere along the line, you will pay for your shoddy workmanship.

The same is true for your spiritual life. It is easier to go with the crowd. It takes less time and energy if you simply maintain a superficial faith. And frankly, most of the time, who can really tell the difference anyway? It's easier to just show up for church for an hour a week than it is to develop spiritual roots. It is easier to talk about caring for others than it is to actually care. It is easier to talk about sharing your faith than it is to build bridges with others. It is easier to talk about commitment than to be committed.

They are short-sighted

The problem with people on the sand is that they do not see beyond the present. They give no thought to what is ahead. They live for the moment and whatever needs to be done to get what they want right now . . . is what they choose to do. These people do not give any thought to preparing for difficult times. They don't save any money. They don't do anything to protect their health. They don't build relationships while there is time. They don't consider the consequences of their moral choices. They live for the moment and are unprepared for difficult times that may be ahead.

In the spiritual realm many people are short-sighted as well. Their focus is all on the temporal world. They give no thought to eternity. They invest no time or energy in developing roots or in laying up treasures in Heaven. They believe they have lots of time to deal with eternal matters. They fail to see that being prepared for eternity and having a solid relationship with God, makes it possible to enjoy the present life more. When the storms blow they don't understand why God seems far away.

They are naive

They really believe that these kinds of things will never happen to them. They believe they will never have to deal with a crisis, or a tragedy, or loss, or financial stress. They are naive. They don't understand that in the next moment life could change drastically. A car accident, a fire, a tornado, an unexpected pregnancy, a job layoff, a physical problem (heart attack, stroke, or some other problem) could come into your life at any time. These things may effect you or they may strike someone you love. We seldom see these things coming. But when they do, life is turned upside down. Life may be good for you right now, but that could change in an instant.

The key principle

The parable of the two houses is a simple parable that teaches: *If you build your foundation solidly on the Lord, you will be able to survive anything.* It sounds painfully trite. But I believe it is true. And I base this conclusion not on my own experience. In fact, I have had to face very few storms in my life. I base this conclusion on the promise of God and on the testimony of history. History is filled with the story of martyrs who remained faithful in horrendous situations. And you and I have watched some who have survived horrible ordeals because of their faith. We have seen others go through circumstances that may have destroyed us . . . but they survived because of their faith. We've even seen people who faced death with courage, grace, and confidence.

We will survive in the storms of life if we make sure Jesus is in our boat and if we build on the right foundation because,

- our strength will not come from us, but from the Lord
- we will not trust our wisdom, but from His
- our focus will not be on present struggle but on our future hope
- we will know where to turn, who to trust, and what is really important.

Maybe you are in a storm right now. Maybe you are in the process of discovering that your foundation is faulty. Friend, please turn to the Lord. You need to immerse yourself in God's Word. You need Christian friends who can give you guidance. You need to place your confidence in His love for You and His work on your behalf. Turn TO Him not away from Him. It will be difficult, but God is merciful and faithful.

If you are not in a storm right now let me remind you that the time to prepare for the struggles and storms of life is now. The best way to avert a crisis is to take the necessary precautions ahead of time. And the best way to prepare for the inevitable trials of life is to build your life on a rock solid foundation. Make time to hear God's commands. Find opportunities to grow in knowledge. Be diligent about doing what He tells you to do. I don't know how much time we have until a storm rages against our lives. The wise person would begin immediately.