

# The Storm on the Lake

by John MacDuff

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*The sermon teaches us about the significance of Jesus' Humanity and Deity, and how He guides His Church through the storms of life.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 46:1, Psalm 107:28, Isaiah 43:2, Matthew 8:23, Mark 4:35, Luke 8:22, Philippians 4:6, Hebrews 13:8, 1 Peter 5:7

**Topics:** "Divine Power", "Faith And Trust"

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## Description

John MacDuff preaches on the story of Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee, emphasizing the dual nature of Christ as fully human and fully divine. The disciples' lack of faith in the midst of the storm serves as a reminder for believers to trust in Jesus, who has power over all creation, including winds and waves. The storm symbolizes the trials and tribulations faced by the Church, both collectively and individually, highlighting the importance of seeking refuge in Christ during life's tempests.

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## Transcript

"Night sinks on the wave,  
Hollow gusts are sighing,  
Sea birds to their cave  
Through the gloom are flying.  
Oh! should storms come sweeping,  
You in heaven unsleeping,  
O'er Your children vigil keeping,  
Hear and save!  
Stars look o'er the sea,  
Few and sad and shrouded;  
Faith our light must be

When all else is clouded.

You whose voice came thrilling,

Wind and billow stilling,

Speak once more our prayer falling--

Power dwells with Thee!"

"Then He got into the boat and His disciples followed Him. Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke Him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!'" Matt. 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25

This is the first of the "Memories of GENNESARET" which have their scenery and illustration not on the shores, but on the Lake itself. Lessons from the lips of the Great Teacher are now read to us amid winds and waters.

We have already, indeed, found our Blessed Redeemer discoursing from the deck of a vessel to the listening multitudes, and, in the miraculous Catch, claiming as the Lord of Nature, dominion over the Fish of the sea. But He is now to manifest His dominion over the Sea itself. As He has already asserted Lordship over its tenants, He is about to claim sovereignty also over their unstable watery realm itself.

Who can estimate the priceless worth of that handful of voyagers, who, in the dusky evening twilight, push off from the Western Shore? That humble fishing-boat contains the Infant Church. It is freighted with the world's Salvation! These winds and waves are charged with sublime moral and spiritual lessons to the end of time. As we hear uttered the mandate which chained the tempests of Galilee, and laid to sleep its waters, we can take up the words of the Psalmist and say, with a nobler than their primary meaning, "O Lord God Almighty, who like you? You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, You still them!"

Let us seek to gather from this interesting incident some of those lofty lessons it is fitted and designed to teach us. It speaks emphatically "concerning Christ and his Church," and let these two points successively engage our thoughts.

The Storm on the Lake speaks CONCERNING CHRIST.

(1.) His HUMANITY is here strikingly brought before us. That same afternoon Jesus had spoken the Parable of the Sower--a parable, as we have remarked, probably suggested by seeing, near to where He stood, a farmer, in early spring, casting his seed into the upturned furrow. Evening had now come. That sower had retired to his home. Already may he have been stretched on his bed of sleep, recruiting his weary frame after the toils of the day. So also had the Heavenly Sower! None more needing repose than He after a day of such unremitting labor!

But where is His home? where His bed? Out amid the chill damps of the evening, a boat is seen gliding along the lake, manned by a few fishermen. They speak with suppressed breath, for a weary, jaded passenger, wrapped for warmth in a coarse fisherman's coat, lies snatching what rest he can find in the back part of the vessel. Let no harsh voice break His rest. He has, during that long day, been scattering the seed of a nobler than any earthly harvest. How deep, how profound are His slumbers! The splash of

the oars--the scream of the birds overhead--disturb Him not. Yet crude is His couch--hard His pillow. They took Him into the boat, (in the quaint but expressive words of Mark,) "Even as He was."--all unrefreshed and unprepared for a voyage. The evening meal probably untasted. The garments needed for crossing the Lake unprovided. His head, as the word in the original seems to imply, rests uneasily on the rough wooden rail at the stern of the boat.

It is a touching incident in the life of the great Apostle, when, "as Paul the Aged," he sent a message to Timothy to bring with him "the cloak he left at Troas" to protect his shivering frame from the cold of a Roman dungeon. But what was this in striking poignancy, compared to the scene we have here? Paul's Master and Lord--the Being of all Beings--GOD Manifest in the flesh--that Adorable human form within which Deity dwelt--laid on the rough planks of a fishing-vessel--exhausted nature demanding refreshment and rest!

We have read of hunted and outlawed monarchs seeking refuge and repose in forest huts. Tales linger in our own land of royal adventurers sleeping soundly and gratefully in the chill mountain cave, or on the clay floor of Highland hovels. But what are these?--poor insignificant nothings in comparison with the scene before us. The Lord of Glory--Immanuel, God with us--out on the bleak sea--the dusk of approaching night for His curtains, the sky for His canopy--stretched like a helpless babe in the arms of sleep--lulled to rest by the music of oars and the ripple of waters!

The scene deepens in interest as the voyage proceeds. When they left the shore, the sun had apparently set peacefully over the Western mountains--the sky was unfretted with a cloud--the sea unruffled with waves. But suddenly one of those squalls or gusts so often experienced in inland lakes came sweeping down the opposite mountain gorge. The gathering clouds answer to the wail of the hurricane. The waves beneath lift their crested forms, and the rain rushes from the blackened heavens. So violent, indeed, does the tempest soon become, that, from the wetting spray dashing over the boat, and the torrents from above, she is fast filling with water--"The waves beat into the ship so that it was now full." It could, indeed, be no mimic storm, no ordinary danger, that would lead the fishermen-disciples, who knew the sea so well from youth, to cower in terror for their safety and abandon themselves to despair.

And what now of that majestic Sleeper? Weary Humanity still asserts its need of repose. The wind is sighing and sweeping around. The rain is pouring on that unprotected pillow. Yet still He slumbers! The wild howling war of the elements awakes Him not! And unless His disciples with rough hand had come and roused Him, these weary eyes would have slept through the storm. Even that last lurch of the vessel which had led the faithless mariners to cry, in an extremity of tremor and agitation, "Master, Master!"--even this had not disturbed that Sleeping Man!

Oh, wondrous, beautiful testimony to the perfect Humanity of Jesus. I say perfect Humanity; for many there are, who, while they speak of Him as Man, think of Him at the same time as something far beyond their sympathies and feelings, their weaknesses and infirmities--a sort of half-Man, half-Angel, incapable of any identity of experience with them--His life a mysterious drama, which they may gaze upon with wonder, but which to them is invested with no personal interest. Look at this picture on the Lake of Tiberias. One only of all that little crew was prostrated with bodily exhaustion, and that one was Jesus!

It is the same Pilgrim Savior who, after traversing the dusty roads of Samaria, with its hot summer sun blazing overhead, flung Himself, weak and way-worn, as best He could, on a well by the wayside, and asked from a Samaritan woman a cup of cold water. It is the same lowly Sufferer who, exhausted with

weariness and watchings--stripes and buffetings--fell powerless under the cross which cruelty compelled Him to bear; or who, as He was transfixed on it, in anguish exclaimed, "I thirst." It is the same Divine Sympathizer whose breaking heart gave vent to its pangs, in audible sobs, at the Graveyard of Bethany. The "Temple of His body" was mysterious indeed--a holy, sinless, unpolluted shrine. But though separate from sinners, it was not separated from human infirmities. Hunger, thirst, weakness, weariness, suffering, pain, had their lodgment there. The motto and superscription on its portico ever was, "Behold the Man!"

Most touchingly do we read this truth in the narrative before us. Ah! when I wish to feel certified of the glorious, upholding, gladdening assurance, that Jesus was indeed "bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh;" that He knows my frame; that He remembers I am dust; that He had the blood of the human race in His veins, and the sinless infirmities of the human race in His nature; that He knows the very lassitude and languor of this frail body, which so often crushes and enfeebles its companion spirit--I go not to hear Angels chanting His advent in the lowly Manger, nor to the Magi hastening, under their guiding star, to present offerings at the feet of that Infant of Bethlehem. I go not even to the home of earthly friendship, to see Him ally Himself with human hearts. I rather go out amid the bleak and howling winds of an earthly Lake. I see there the Savior who died for me, sunk in slumber on the deck of a vessel--glad for rest, as the humblest son of earthly toil--the prostration of an overwrought frame refusing to be roused by nature's loudest accents, and requiring the hands and voice of His own Disciples to unseal His weary eyelids!

Again--while a perfect Humanity, observe, further, it was a pure, spotless HUMANITY, which belonged to Jesus.

That peaceful Slumberer on lake Gennesaret is the type of Innocence. If Jonah out-slept his storm, it was because his conscience was lulled and deadened. He had defied his God; and his God for the moment had so left the Atheist Prophet, that the tempest's rage fell disregarded on his soul. But a Greater, a Holier than Jonah, is here! No moral storm ever swept over that pure, calm, sinless spirit. No unquiet, disturbing vision of guilt, now flits across the Sleeper's bosom.

On the other side of the lake where He was going, a demon-crowd of Devils haunted the gorges of Gadara. According to some writers (as having in their power the destructive agencies of nature by reason of the sin of man), they may have been riding now on the wings of this storm, doing their best to avert their own approaching adversary. Think of their bosoms tortured by the memory of a guilty past, maddened to despair by the prospect of a hopeless future; the sport of tempests, of which Gennesaret's surface was then a feeble type. These wicked were like that "troubled sea which cannot rest." But see the Spotless Lamb of God!--in the absence of all human comforts, yet with the calm treasure of a peaceful conscience, He sleeps tranquilly, as the cradled infant which a mother's gentle lullaby has sung to rest!

But (2.) The scene we are now considering also speaks concerning the Savior's DEITY.

It is remarkable, that in all the more memorable incidents of our Lord's life, whenever His lowliness and humiliation are signally manifested, there is generally, in conjunction with this, some majestic exhibition of His Godhead. His Humanity was proclaimed in the lowly stable of His birth; but in that same hour Angels over Bethlehem sung of His glory. His Humiliation was touchingly proclaimed in receiving baptism (a sinner's rite) at a sinner's hand; but the Heavens were opened, and a sublime voice from "the Excellent Glory" attested His Divinity. Bethany's teardrops spoke of the tenderness of His Human heart. Bethany's word of omnipotence, which summoned the putrefying dead man from the tomb, proclaimed the majesty of His Godhead. Calvary's Cross shows us a dying man--the crown of thorns--the gash of the spear--the

criminal's torture--the malefactor associates--all speak of the depths of Humiliation. But a blackened sun; riven rocks; the earth trembling to support its Creator's cross--were nature's glorious testimonies that He who hung in ignominy on that tree was "The Mighty God."

We have the same contrast of lowliness and greatness in this scene on the Lake of Galilee. "As the Son of Man," says a writer, "He slept; but as the Son of God in Man, He awakes and speaks. For Himself, exhausted; for others, Almighty." He opens His eyes on that scene of nature's wildest uproar, and sitting undisturbed in the midst of it, counsels and comforts. First, as a great Master reproofing His disciples' fears, and then as the great God uttering His "Peace, be still." As the Lord almighty over the atmosphere above, and the waters beneath, He addresses each separately. Looking upward, first to the storm raging on high, He rebukes the wind, saying 'Peace!' Then turning to the waves below, the angry surging of the sea, He adds, 'Be still.' A new element in nature thus casts a trophy at His feet, and owns Him her Lord!

We have already witnessed, on the shores of the Lake, His power over bodily diseases. We have seen the leper cleansed by His touch. The centurion's servant healed by a distant message. Now would He show that "dragons, and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and vapor, stormy wind," are equally ready to "fulfill His word." "He spoke, and it was done!" There are no labored means required. The intervention of no rod, as in the case of Moses, to stretch over the deep. From the fishing-vessel, as His throne, He issued His behest. Every wave rocked itself to rest. The winds returned to their chambers. The lights on the shore were once more reflected in the waveless sea--"Immediately there was a great calm." Well might the disciples, as they beheld the power of that marvelous mandate, exclaim, in the words of their Psalmist King, as they crouched adoring at their Master's feet, "The sea is His, and He made it; and His hands formed the dry land. Oh, come let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker!"

While we exult in the Humanity, let us evermore exult in the Deity of Christ. Had Deity not inhabited the bosom of that sleeping Man, the disciples must have had a yawning sepulcher in these depths. We would have had to tell this day of nothing except ruined souls and a sinking world. It was His Deity which impressed an untold value on all His doings and dying. Take away the great keystone of Christianity--that Godhead dwelt in the bosom of Messiah--and our hopes for eternity lie buried with His unrisen body in the grave at Jerusalem! But "His name is Immanuel, GOD with us." While we look up to heaven and see a MAN upon the throne, we can at the same time exclaim, "Your Throne, O GOD, is forever and ever!" The combination of the two in the one person of the Ever-living Redeemer, makes Him to be all we need, and all that we can desire.

It is, indeed, in His glorified Humanity He now lives and reigns. He needs no longer, as at this eventide scene on Gennesaret, earthly rest. His period of weakness, His struggle with human infirmity, is over. We need not, like the disciples, now go to awake Him; for in yonder glorious Heaven "He faints not, neither is weary." "He that keeps Israel" now "neither slumbers nor sleeps." But His heart of love knows no change. He is "that same Jesus," our God yet our Brother, our Brother yet our God!

There may be comfort to some here in the thought (more especially brought before us in this passage in connection with Christ's deity) that He rules over winds and waves. "What kind of man," exclaimed the disciples, "is this, for even the winds and the sea obey Him." No storm that sweeps the ocean can defy His power, or resist His control. These boisterous elements are His ministers and messengers. Not one storm-cloud can gather--not one crested wave rise--not one board can loosen--without His permission, who "holds the winds in His fists." All power is committed to Him in Heaven and on Earth.

The Satanic Prince of the power of the air, if some mysterious dominion is assigned to him, has a mightier One to control His demon rage; and whether it be the atmosphere that comes loaded with plague and fever, pestilence and cholera--or the hurricane that uproots a forest and overturns a house, burying a beloved child in the ruins--or the tornado that strews the bosom of the ocean with the pride of navies, or sends wailing and widowhood into the fisherman's lonely Dwelling--"The Lord sits upon the floods; yes! the Lord sits as King forever." "The floods, O Lord, have lifted up, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. But the Lord on High is mightier than the noise of many waters; yes, than the mighty waves of the sea!"

But, II. The text speaks, not only "concerning Christ," but "concerning HIS CHURCH." This both in its collective and in its individual capacity.

In previously considering the miraculous catch, we found the fish enclosed in the net were designed to form an instructive pledge and symbol to the "Fishers of Men" of the success of their labors. If the Fish were thus typical of immortal souls; the element in which they lived, the heaving, changing, restless water, with its fitful alternations of calm and tempest, was surely an appropriate picture of human life, swept with storms and strewed with wrecks. And if, as we believe, each portion of this sacred incident is filled with symbolic instruction, we may warrantably look also for some figurative truth in that tossed vessel with its frightened crew. Nor is there much difficulty in finding its true place in the Sacred Allegory. If the Ark of Noah, in the old patriarchal deluge, was not only a befitting type of the Church, but was really the Church of God, tossed on that raging flood; have we not in this Gennesaret vessel the Gospel type and symbol of the same--the Church in the world, and yet not of the world--subject to the storms of persecution, often hurried into guilty fears and faithless distrust and misgiving--yet her Lord, not (as in the extremity of her unbelief she sometimes supposes), like Baal, slumbering and sleeping, but seated invisible at her helm, guiding her through the roaring surge, and enabling her to ride out the tempest!

At no period has the Church been exempt from such hurricanes. Even in these our days (though, thank God, the outer storm is hushed, and she is holding on her way in these favored lands through calm and tranquil seas), there are discerning spirits who can catch up distant indistinct mutterings--presages of a coming tempest, more fearful than any she has yet buffeted--"the sea and the waves roaring, and men's hearts failing them for fear." If, before the Millennial morning breaks, there is thus a deeper and darker night of trial in reserve for the Church of Christ--Satan and his demon-throng, riding on the wings of persecution, putting forth their last giant effort for her destruction--be it ours to exult in the thought that there is a Sleepless PILOT at her helm, who can say, like His great Apostle in the Adrian storm, "I exhort you to take courage!" "GOD is in the midst of her: she shall not be moved: THE LORD shall help her, and that right early."

(2.) This passage speaks concerning the Church in her individual capacity.

It speaks of Disciple life and Disciple experience. It is easy for us to speak and theorize about Faith, but God often casts us into the crucible to test and purify our gold, and separate it from the dross and alloy. He brings us into the vortex of the storm to see whether we shall wring our hands in faithless despair, or rush to our Master. The disciples in Gennesaret had acted unfaithfully; untrustingly. They might have known that, though the wail and death-shriek of perishing crews had been heard all around, one boat at least would have defied the rush of waters and roar of winds. With Jesus in their midst, they need have feared no evil.

The simple fact of His presence ought to have been pledge and guarantee enough that their safety was secured. If some more cowardly spirit than the rest had urged His being awakened--some impetuous Peter, in his eager impulsive haste, had hurried to the stern to utter his unbelieving fears--we would have expected some one of the others of calmer mold and stronger faith, some John or James, to have arrested the intruder, saying, "Do not disturb Him!" Sooner shall these mountains that gird the lake be removed, than He allow "one of His little ones to perish." Let us gaze in calm serenity on the face of the Almighty Sleeper. Let us "be still and know that He is GOD!"

But, alas! for the moment they seem all to have been involved in the same unworthy anxiety, "Master, Master! Don't You care that we are going to drown?"

We cannot, we dare not, to a certain extent, wonder at their fear. So far it was natural. There was much to awaken apprehension. Their ship reeling on the waves, and their Lord appearing unconscious of their danger "asleep on a pillow." It was the excess of their terror which drew forth the rebuke. Each Evangelist in recording it gives a slight variation. One says, "You have little faith;" another, "Where is your faith?" a third, "You have no faith." But in all the three cases it is the lack of FAITH which is blamed; the lack of that principle which "casts out fear." We may wonder, perhaps, at the severity of the condemnation. Was Faith on their part really so utterly lacking? Did not rather their very rushing to their sleeping Lord seem to indicate the intensity of their trust in that perilous crisis-hour? They felt that if they are to be rescued at all from a dreadful grave, it can be by Him alone. Yet, observe, He rebukes them, as if their Faith were poor, trifling, unworthy of the name!

How is this?--It is plain that His condemnation of it is relative. It is judged by a standard of its own. Had some of the multitude (not the disciples) manned this vessel, and rushed thus imploringly in the tempest to awake Him, probably, as in the case of the Gentile Centurion, Jesus would have commended their faith as great. But these anxious disciples were those who should have known better than to distrust for one moment His ability and willingness to save. Had they witnessed to so little purpose His recent miracles? Had they heard with so little profit His recent Discourse of heavenly wisdom? Unkind and cruel, in the case of trusted friends, was the cry with which they roused Him, "Don't You CARE that we are going to drown?" Anything to that beneficent Being would have been less cutting and wounding than this--"Don't You CARE!" It was doubting not His power but His Love, that love to which every hour since they knew Him had borne testimony.

How kindly, gently, considerately, yet faithfully, He deals with them! He utters no reproach for that crude awaking, robbing Him of the slumber He so greatly needed, and which His untiring energy elsewhere denied Him. But, gazing with earnestness upon them, He puts the penetrating question, which must have gone like an arrow to their hearts, "Why are you so fearful?" He speaks as a faithful Master to His faithless disciples before He turns to speak to the elements. The winds and waves He allows to revel at will before He has delivered in the hearing of the Voyagers the word of needed reproof. He has no ear for the warring elements, until, in mingled severity and kindness, He has poured oil on the troubled sea of these vexed hearts.

Are any of us thus fearful? Jesus turns to us and says "Won't you trust Me? Look at Calvary's Cross! Is that not a pledge and guarantee that I will never leave you nor forsake you? For, a small moment I may appear to have forsaken you, but with great mercies will I gather you--with everlasting kindness will I have mercy upon you!"

Let this be with us, as with the disciples, the result of all these storms of Trial--to drive us nearer our Heavenly Master, and endear Him to our souls. They wondered at the moment, doubtless, what could be the cause of such a storm. Why not have arrested it or kept it chained in its mountain hold, until that boat with its valued crew got safe to land?

Thus they may have reasoned while the tempest was overhead, and their hearts failed them for fear. But what was their verdict when they were planting their anchor in the white sands on the Gadara shore? They said one to another, "What kind of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" Their Lord rose higher than ever in their estimation. In the future manifold sacred memories of that wondrous ministry, how the combined remembrance of the weary MAN and the Almighty GOD would brace them for their great fight of afflictions! That "peace, be still," has been a motto and watchword which these howling winds of Gennesaret have wafted from age to age and from climate to climate, sustaining faith in sinking hearts, and producing in many a storm-swept bosom a "great calm!"

Oh, happy for us if all the hurricanes that ruffle life's unquiet sea have the effect of making Jesus more precious. If God has to employ stormy trials, severe afflictions, for this end, let us not quarrel with His wise ordination. Better the storm with Christ than the smooth water without Him.

"Far more the treach'rous calm I dread

Than tempests bursting overhead."

It is the experience, not of the luxurious hotel, but of the harsh battle-field, the trench and night-watch, which makes the better and hardier soldier. It is not the exotic plant nursed in the glass hothouse and artificial heat which is the type of strength; but the plant struggling for existence on bleak cliffs, or the pine battling with Alpine gusts, or shivering amid Alpine snows. If there be a sight in the spiritual world more glorious than another, it is when one sees (as may often be seen,) a Believer growing in strength and trust in God, by reason of his very trials--battered down by storm and hail, a great fight of afflictions--enduring loss of substance--loss of health--loss of friends--yet, standing by emptied coffers and full graves, and with an aching but resigned heart, enabled to say "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever!"

Never let us take our trials as an indication that God is angry with us; saying, like Martha, in our blind unbelief, "Lord, if You had been here, this never would have happened. The Savior cannot have been at my side, or else this desolating storm would never have swept over me." No, He was with the disciples--sleeping in their very boat--when the Gennesaret hurricane descended. "Behold," says the Evangelist (as if arresting our attention to the fact), "Behold" (when He is voyaging with His own apostles) "there arose a great tempest." And often is it so still. He selects the blackest cloud, and causes His people to pass through it, that He may span it with His Rainbow of mercy, and show in blended colors, His power, and faithfulness and, love!

And what remains, but to urge you to flee to that same adorable almighty Savior, and to cast all your cares on Him who has shown you, at such a cost, how He cares for you. You who are in perplexity, temptation, trial--enviored with storms of unbelief and doubt and inward corruption--go to your Lord as the disciples did. They give you a new testimony to the power of Prayer. It was Prayer that roused their Divine Master. He continued asleep until His disciples awoke Him. And the great principle in the gospel dispensation still is, "Ask, and you shall receive." How beautifully is here brought out His willingness to hear the cries of His perishing people! All the roar of the hurricane--the voice of wind, and rain, and mountain waves--awakes

Him not; but the cries and entreaties of His people, at once reach His ear!

Let us, then, arise and call upon our God. The great lesson taught both to the Disciples and to us in this storm, is that, in nearness to Jesus lies all our safety. Weak faith, and Little faith, as well as Great faith, are encouraged to rush to this Great Deliverer! The world is at best a treacherous sea. Its Painted Boats may hold on for a while their uncertain course, spreading their white wings before summer gales and favoring breezes. But a sudden hurricane comes; the waters are strewn with their wrecks, and "the place which once knew them knows them no more!" But, safe in the Ark of God, steered by the Heavenly Pilot, we are as secure as combined omnipotence and love can make us. And when earthly storms are all over, every crested wave of a chequered past will only endear to us more the Haven of rest, where the tempest's voice will be never more either felt or feared!

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