

The Crisis of Desperation

by Paris Reidhead

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing our helplessness and recognizing the sufficiency of God in times of crisis and desperation.

Duration: 37:49

Scripture: Matthew 5:17, Matthew 11:28, Matthew 23:13, Mark 12:37, John 4:24, John 6:21, 2 Peter 1:21

Topics: "Desperation"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Jesus sending his disciples out into a storm on a boat. The preacher emphasizes that God allowed the storm to happen in order to teach the disciples a lesson about relying on Him. The disciples initially tried to row and bail out water on their own, but eventually realized that they needed to trust in God's sufficiency. The preacher also mentions the story of the little boy who had food with him but didn't eat it because he was completely focused on Jesus. The sermon concludes by encouraging listeners to trust in God's provision and to not fear the challenges of tomorrow.

Transcript

If you would like to turn to John chapter 6, our message from God's Word will be found in this portion. The text is the 21st verse. Then they willingly received him into the ship, and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.

The eyes that have seen Jesus, said Saint Augustine, find all objects but Jesus unworthy of their regard. This ought to be true in our lives. However, frequently our Lord gives clear evidence that he knows that inner magnetism that draws our eyes away from him to lesser things.

Thus, we expect to find him understanding of our natures and patient with us. We know that he loved us when we were utterly unworthy, when there was nothing to commend us to him. We're not surprised, therefore, to find that he does tenderly and graciously bear with us until he sees that heart of stubbornness and rebellion that refuses to walk in his way.

But the text that we've read gives clear evidence of the understanding patience of the Lord with each of us. We see first our Lord's concern for the multitudes. For a great company of people have followed him into the mountains.

He has viewed them not as a throng, not as a mass, but as men and women, boys and girls. He see, he always saw the whole person. And it behooves us to understand that our Lord's ministry was never, quote, to the soul as some excrescence of personality apart from the person.

He loved men and he loved women and he gave himself for the whole person. And it behooves us to understand that this is what he expects of us in our evangelism as well. And our Lord's concern for the multitude was a personal concern for the individuals that made up the throng.

He saw their need for truth and their hunger for truth. They had gone to teachers that had been endorsed by their fathers as being the custodians of truth. They had attended the synagogue school.

They'd listened to the exposition of the rabbis. They were acquainted with the traditions and the teachings of Israel. However, you'll see the pure word of God had to some degree been made of none effect.

Our Lord said this. He said the traditions, the teachings of the elders have robbed the word of its significance and its meaning of its point and its purpose. And therefore our Lord brought them back not only to the Torah, but beyond the Torah to his own heart.

For Moses spoke as he was moved by the Lord Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, and thus our Lord could carry them as he did in the Sermon on the Mount right past the interpretation given by the fathers to that which was in his heart when he spoke through Moses. He recognized their need for truth and their desire for truth and their willingness to sit and listen when truth was proclaimed. The common people heard him gladly.

They were prepared to recognize that he spoke as no other man ever spoke. They sat at his feet and he always spoke to them. Isn't it strange, even wonderful, that one of the most profound utterances of our Lord should have been given to that woman of questionable virtue at the well when he said, God is spirit.

They that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. Where else was such truth honored by our Lord? Nothing higher than this. And he saw their need for truth and capacity for truth and willingness to receive it.

And so he taught them gladly, even as they heard him gladly. But he also saw the need of the people for help. And so when they came with their sickness, he wasn't interested only in their spirits, in their souls, but he knew that when the body raged with fever, the mind was incapable of contemplating eternal truth.

And so he addressed himself to their physical need. When the body was racked and twisted, as he said, Satan having bound the daughter of Abraham for these 18 years, he loosed her or he knew that he had to loose her body if he were to lose her mind and lose her spirit as well. He was concerned about the whole person, about their minds and about truth, about their spirits and their response to truth and about their bodies.

But he also knew that they had continuing needs. And so when he spoke to the rich young ruler and challenged him to give all that he possessed to the poor, he didn't send him out on the street to beg. He said, come, follow me.

Our Lord had a plan. And our Lord has a will, a plan for every child of his. He is concerned about your living.

He is concerned about money to meet your needs. He is concerned about your protection and your preservation and your survival. You can bring the most humble request to him.

And he understands. He knew what it was to have a villager come into Joseph's carpenter shop and say, the yoke on my oxen is broken and I need a yoke. And it was our Lord's task as a carpenter to take a piece of wood free from knots and that which would have galled and made sore the shoulder of the oxen and saw to plane it and saw to shape it and saw to smooth it, that when it would pit the oxen, he recognized the need of the ox.

He recognized the need of the farmer and the need of the family. Would anyone that had addressed himself to such concerns ever be unconcerned about the need of any? Not so. Our Lord knew their need.

And as they had come to listen to him, he spoke truth. He healed them that were sick in body. And when they were hungry, he was concerned.

And in his concern, he said to Philip, what are you going to do? The responsibility is yours. Feed them. And you recall the response as Philip looked and said, saw the throng and said, why he had a vast sum of money in mind for Philip when he said 200 penny worth won't even give them a crumb.

Our Lord was concerned for them, and he knew that his disciples ought to be concerned. And the very throng, the press of the mass, the multitude ought not have dimmed their concern, for it had not changed his. And thus it behooves us to recognize that as we as a church serve the Lord here in the midst of a multitude of people, a world everywhere I go, I tell my friends that New York can never again be viewed as an Anglo-Saxon community, a Protestant community to be served as it's been served 100 years ago.

New York has become a world city and as a world city, a world mission field. And the throng must not overwhelm us. And the multitude must not discourage us.

Because when he put Philip into the midst of the people's need, he provided Philip with everything in him necessary to meet the need. But I ask of us that we recognize his concern for the multitude that have not bread. And so our Lord showed his concern for the multitude.

It hasn't changed at all. He said, go ye therefore and teach, preach the gospel to every creature. He didn't say preach it to the world.

Yes, he did the world, but it was every creature. He's concerned about that man, that woman, that boy, that girl that breathes the breath of human life and has fears and hopes and aspirations and longings. And our Lord is sensitive to them and sympathetic with them and concerned about them.

But our Lord's method was his people, his Lord's missions was his disciples. And so we find that his concern is not only for the multitude, but his concern is for these whom he's called to share with him in the task. And we see his concern for his disciples.

He knew their needs. He had gone into the mountain expressly that they might have a little protection from the throng, that they might have rest. I frequently think that the Lord was not nearly as responsible for many of the schedules that we erect as we are for them ourselves.

I'm sure that your schedule, with all of the intense occupation that it demands of you, may have to be reconsidered in the light of his will. Our Lord certainly was concerned that his people had rest. He said,

come apart and rest a while.

And in his inimitable way, Vance Havner, seeing the frenetic Christians that are everywhere, said, do the Lord was concerned that his people rest. If we do not come apart, said Mr. Havner, we're going to come apart. And on every hand, we see people that are coming apart because they haven't recognized that the Lord was concerned for a proper place for rest.

He knew they needed fellowship with him and with each other. And so he had taken them to this mountain top. He'd taken them to this place that there they could encourage one another and strengthen one another, share their needs and their burdens, share their victories and triumphs, and find that he was the author of all, both the burden and the victory.

They needed teaching. They needed truth to be quickened again to their hearts. And so he'd taken them into the mountain there that he might teach them and instruct them and nourish them in things eternal.

And the Lord will ever do that for you, his servants. And remember, you are his disciple. And when he shows concern for his disciple, it is for everyone that names his name.

He wants you to learn to rest in him and to learn that the victory is not in your doing for him, but his doing through you. And he wants you to have fellowship, far more fellowship with each other than you've known in the past. I believe that the degree of spiritual progress might be related to our spiritual fellowship.

But then there was something else our Lord was concerned about. He was concerned that his disciples should discover their own impotence. He wanted them to see how little they had.

And so he called Philip and said, Philip, you are here as one of mine. Will you please undertake the responsibility of feeding the throng? And you see, Philip was still thinking in terms of what he brought to Christ, that Christ was going to be limited to what he brought to him. And so he remembered what was in the bag that Judas carried, and some personal funds that he might have been given or he had held.

And he figured that if he gleaned every penny that these 11 or 12 had, that it wouldn't be more than 200 penny worth. And so he measured it in terms of their willingness to sacrifice what they had to meet the need. And our Lord wanted him to see right then that the task was not to be measured in terms of what they brought to Christ, but in terms of what Christ was bringing to them.

And so he wanted them to see their impotence. And Andrew came, a more practical man, for there wasn't any place even to buy the 200 penny worth of bread. They couldn't, there wasn't a bakery out there.

And so we find a miracle. Do you know what the miracle is? The miracle is that a little boy waits till late in the afternoon before he opens his lunch. Have you, most of you, some of you have never been little boys, but some of us that have are aware of the fact that when little boys start out in the morning on a hike to take a lunch, mother better pack too, because they're going to be three whole blocks away from home and they're going to say, I'm hungry.

And so in the next three blocks, they're going to nibble on the sandwiches and eat the fruit. And by the time 11 o'clock has come, everything they had is gone. Well, here's a little lad that's come this distance and gone through the noon hour and to the afternoon, and he hasn't opened the package that mother gave him when he started out.

Now this, in my mind, is a miracle testifying to the utter engagement with Christ that this little lad demonstrated. The Lord had so completely occupied him that he lost all concern for his stomach. This was an unusual thing, but the important thing was that Andrew knew about it.

Now, I don't know how Andrew knew about it, whether he'd had spies out in the group or whether the little boy had heard of the dilemma. It doesn't tell us, but we do know that the word finally got to Andrew who brought it to the Lord. Isn't this just like us? We're going to find the answer in what we have.

We're going to measure it by what we bring. And if 200 penny worth won't do it, here's five loaves and a few fishes. Now, I've never known whether this was an evidence of unbelief or of faith, but at least I know that Andrew came and said, Lord, this is all we have.

How are we going to feed them? You see, our Lord Jesus wanted his disciples to know that he was the answer to every opportunity. My dear friend, do we today realize how singularly we're failing the Lord Jesus in so many areas of responsibility? It is because we have been working with the 200 penny worth. It's because we've been trying to distribute the five loaves and the few fishes, and it isn't going to work.

Our Lord wanted us through this to understand that we measure our responsibilities not by what we have in our hands to be used by him, but what he has in his hands to be used by us. We're so reluctant to do it. He wanted his disciples to discover that whenever he is placed in the midst of any situation and the government is laid upon his shoulder, he is sufficient.

I have a little booklet to which I've made reference, and if any of you need it or want it, I'll be so happy to share it with you. But dear Gladys Dieterle, this lovely, fragrant Christian whom I see alongside of Miss Frances, who was here last Sunday night, these two, one from Japan, one from China, are among the most gracious and godly of the flowers of faithful womanhood and missionaries that I've ever known. Gladys Dieterle wrote years ago this little booklet, Christ in the Midst, and set forth that truth that continues to be like the myrrh and the geisha out of the ivory palaces to my heart.

I read it again and again and again. This lovely picture of our Lord in the midst of the situation with the government upon his shoulder, and whatever this happens, then he can act according to his name. Remember what Isaiah said, unto us a child is born and unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

Whenever we put the government on his shoulder, admitting our helplessness, recognizing our weakness, our impotence, then he can be according to his name, and then we find that he is mighty in the midst of his people. And here, when they have a responsibility to feed a throng of hungry people, they have nothing but a little bread, just a boy's lunch. They bring it to the Lord and say, Lord, we're helpless, we're utterly infant, and we can't meet the need.

Then he says, I want you to see that the need isn't met by what you bring to me, but what I bring to you. And if you'll just allow me to be to you what I want to be, see what will happen. And so we find that they present him the lunch.

The little boy gives it gladly to him. He begins to bless it and break it. The people are, the men sit down in companies of 50 elsewhere, we're told, 5,000 men that are there to receive the food in behalf of themselves or their families.

And the company may then, if you figure three to one, have been probably 20,000 or 15,000, but at any rate, a vast company of people. And when all had been fed, all had been filled, they were then offered, they instructed to go and gather up the bread for the Palestinian as great reverence for bread, the Arab as well. For if you go visit an Arab home, you'll find a crumb of bread in the yard, and the Arab won't allow it to lay there to be threatened or trodden underfoot, for the gifts of God ought not be despised, but he'll pick the little crumb up and set it in a crevice in the wall so that the birds may eat what God has given for man.

And so he gathered up all of the fragments, and there were 12 baskets full, one for each of the apostles. And he demonstrated to them that he was adequate, he was utterly sufficient both for the people and for his servants. But notice now, in closing, our Lord's purpose for his people.

They hadn't learned yet, he demonstrated, but you see, my dear friend, it's not teaching. It is teaching, but it's not only teaching. It isn't illustration, it's illustration, but it isn't only illustration of truth that makes that truth real in your life.

Oh, you've heard truth for years before it became yours. You've seen things for years before they became real in your life. It isn't just hearing, it isn't just seeing.

I've said it in no other way to get the truth to your heart, but to say it again, all spiritual progress is made in the crisis of desperation, not in contemplation, not simply in considering the word and viewing it and looking at it, that, but not only that. That's important, but that's not enough. It's not enough to have a mental visualization of the words that describe the doctrine, or even some insight into the nature of it.

This we can have without having come to that place where we've got to work on it. No, truth doesn't become yours because you've seen it illustrated in another's light. It doesn't become yours because you've heard it described and presented, and it becomes yours when you are utterly desperate.

The wit's end corner is the place of spiritual appropriation. Someone has said man's extremity is God's opportunity, and I assure you of this, the truth that you've heard from this pulpit for years and years, and you that have attended for those years, will someday if he carries become real in your life when he's utterly crowded you into the corner and there's no place to turn. Then you will run down and step on the water and find that it's solid beneath your feet.

Our Lord knew this. Oh, he wanted them to see that the sufficiency was not of them, but was of him. So he sent them away.

He sent them away into circumstances that they couldn't control. Circumstances that would strip them. Circumstances that would crush them and crowd them and bring them to himself.

You see, in his foreknowledge, he knew about the storm. Just as in his foreknowledge, he knew how he's going to feed the multitude. But he also knew that his disciples hadn't learned it yet, and he insisted that they learn this truth, that the sufficiency was of him, not of them.

So he sent them away, says one of the writers. He sent them away. He sent them out into the sea, and he knew that the storm would come.

They were sailors. If you would have met these men as they pushed that boat off the sand and into the water and the wind filled the sail, one of them sat down and said, well, we didn't know how to feed the multitude, but I'll tell you one thing we do know, and that's how to get a boat across this way. And we've

been here long enough that look at that sky, look at that wind, we're going to get it out.

Oh yes, they were quite complacent and quite certain that they knew the answer. They didn't know him nearly as well as they should, because that sky that seemingly held nothing but promise of a fair voyage was obedient to the one who made it. And it was his intention that these disciples should become what they ought to be rather than simply have a safe trip.

Listen, my dear, the Lord Jesus is far more concerned about the one who stands in front of you and about you than he is about anything we're doing for him. The Lord Jesus is far more interested in what's happening in you than what's being done through you. He's far more interested in what he's doing in us than what we're doing for him, because he can tell he does in us what he wants to do, he can't do to us what he's purposed to do.

And he knows what he's sending us into tomorrow, the sovereign God that reigns. He knows the storm that's going to break, we're going to cry, oh why, why, why? And there's only one answer, why? Because the God who loved us has all things worked together for good to them that love him, that are called according to his purpose and said all things shall fulfill my purpose of conforming them to the image of my son. So he sent them away, sent them into the sea, sent them in the ship, sent them into the storm.

First they took down the sail and bound it up and then they began to row seven or eight miles of lake and they've come 30 to 40 furlongs, three or four miles and they're toiling and they're bailing. Oh isn't it amazing? Isn't it just amazing how we prefer to row rather than to rest and to bail rather than to obey and to try rather than trust. The Lord loved them, just let the wind blow until they bailing was no avail, rowing was no avail.

Why? He wanted to prepare them for himself. So what did we find? A demonstration of his sovereignty. Oh my, do you have any concept of the sovereignty of God? Does your heart rest in his sovereignty? Have you seen one that reigns? Do you worship one who rules? Nothing can touch you, nothing can hurt you because he's on the throne and he loved you with an everlasting love and he said all things must work together for good to them that love him.

You worship a sovereign God or have you made someone in your own image and likeness? So glad that the God of the Bible is here and he's walking on the water, sovereign over storms, sovereign over circumstances, sovereign over events, and he's always walking on the storm. It's no different what storm you're going through and I know if all the storms that are represented in this little company were expressed to us we'd be in tears before the hour was past. My dear heart, I want you to know that the Lord you loved is letting you in the storm and he's walking on it, he is walking on that storm, sovereign over it.

Can we see something else? His disciples were afraid. They weren't afraid of the storm. This was the hazard of their occupation for many of them were fishermen.

You know what they were afraid of? They were afraid of him. They learned to fear him. For here is one that sent them into the storm and is walking on the storm and they're afraid.

Does fear come into your heart? Do you fear him with that holy godly fear that he merits and he deserves? Have you fallen at his feet as did Peter? Depart from me Lord, I'm a sinful man. Have you fallen on your face before the revelation of Christ in the midst of the candlesticks with his face shining as the brightness of the sun? You've seen him in his majesty. This Lord that loves you and makes every circumstance

contribute to the end of shaping you and molding you to his image and likeness.

You've seen him in his majesty. Then if you have, you've heard him in his mercy. Through the midst of your circumstance and the storm and the grief and the heartache, you can hear him saying, it is I, it is I, be not afraid.

I've let the wind come, I've let the wave rise, I've let the boat sail, I've done it, it is I, be not afraid. Oh you needn't fear your circumstances if you fear God because he's above circumstance. But if you do not fear God, you'll fear everything else.

And when you fear God, you need fear nothing. It is I, be not afraid. This they knew, now prepared them.

He knew prepared them. Their preparation and his preparation met in that moment when they realized that everything that touched him was in his sovereignty ordained to the end of making them like him. And so we find our takes.

Our Lord Jesus never comes on board your life, my dear, until he can come willingly received into the ship. He never intrudes. He knows us.

He knows that we'd rather bail than pray. He knows we'd rather roll and rest. He knows that we'd rather die trying than die to our trying by trusting.

We sing, there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey. And then having sung the song, we give a contest and prizes to figure out ways that we can do it other than by trusting and praying and resting and praying. He knows us.

But you see, he loves us too much to let us get by with it. And so he's going to let a storm come in my life and a storm come in your life and a storm that will strip our sails and break our rudder and fill our boat. And when we're sinking in lots of desperation, we'll see him walking on the storm and then we can take him into the ship.

Lord, I catch what you catch. Wisdom and grace and strength and understanding and love and power and everything. And when he comes, received willingly to be captain, willingly to rule, and the government is put upon his shoulders, then you find what it said.

They were instantly at the land. He'd taken things in his own control. And what they couldn't do, he did.

Now he knows us. Do I speak today to a weary rower? Do I speak to someone that's tired of bailing? Do I speak to someone that's at wit's end corner, that's at extremity? Do you feel the wind and storm of your own nature? Blowing, howling, uncleanness, mischievousness, anger, wrath, vanity, ambition. And inside you is that howling gale of test and temptation and problem and difficulty.

Is that true? And you say as your little boat founders in the swell, how, how, how can I get victory? Listen, there's one walking on the water. And if you'll willingly receive him into the ship, he's going to give you victory over that nature. You turn the government over to him and take your place with him in the cross and death so that he can live in life.

Then you're going to find that you'll be instantly at the shore. Someone that's being tormented by past failures and past sins, haunted by the memory of the past. What can wash away my sin? Oh, can't you see that here's one that walks on the water.

He walks on all the sins of the past. He walks on all the waves of disobedience. He walks there because he's gone to the cross and gone into death and come up in resurrection.

And now he can say, thy sins be forgiven thee. And the storm of memory that haunts and torments can be stopped and you can be instantly at the shore of peace because you willingly received him into the ship and all your sin laid upon him. Now I speak to someone that's weary with a battle against circumstances.

Pressures, family, needs, responsibilities. How can you ever survive? How can you ever get from day to night and from night to day? The burdens are too heavy and the needs too great. Circumstances too pressing.

I have good news for you. There's one that's walking on those circumstances. If you'll but bid him come and receive him willingly into the ship, then he's going to take care of those difficult.

And you'll be instantly at the shore. Then there are some that tremble at the fear of tomorrow's responsibilities. They don't quite know how to face the future.

Utterly inadequate for all the demands that are being made upon them. Incapable to face life. Trying to escape it.

Trying to avoid it. Trying to get out of it. But they can't do it all.

How can I? Tomorrow is too much for me. And their little ship begins to ponder and swell and the waves come and beat. But I see one walking on the water of that tomorrow.

He knows all about it. And if you're at the place where you say I can't, then you can equally say he can. And you bid him come willingly into the ship.

Invite him to come. Listen. Listen to him now.

Whatever your burden, whatever your responsibility, whether it's a great load of guilt and you've come in here under the sentence of death with your sins like a mountain separating you from God. A Christian that's failed, that needs victory and hasn't found it. And one that's under the midst of the pressure of great physical pressure and circumstances of sickness or disappointment or discouragement or need or someone that trembles at the future.

Listen to me. I hear him. I see him on the water and he's saying it is I. Be not afraid.

Be not afraid. Oh, won't you bid this one who alone was worthy to stand on the sea of glass and take the book and open the book, the book of the future, the book of all things that transpire. Won't you willingly receive him into the ship of your life and turn the government over to him? He's waiting.

For everyone that will willingly receive him into the ship will find that they're instantly assured. Shall we pray? Where's your need? Where's your problem? Where's the storm raging and boiling in your life? Where's the threat? Where's the fear? Where's the heartache? Where's the grief? Where's the fear? Do not see him. He's walking on the water.

All of these things that threaten are under his feet. He's saying to you in the midst of the storm, it is I. Be not afraid. Oh, bid him come into your life.

Put the government of that life on him. Bid him come into your temptation where the hurricane rages. Put it on him.

Bid him come into your home, into your circumstances. Bid him come into your future. Put the government on his shoulder.

Put him in the midst. Receive him into the ship. He'll do according to his wonderful name, wonderful counsel and mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Just now your doubtings give out. Just now throw open the door, won't you? And let Jesus, know all that Jesus is. Come into your heart.

Let us stand together for prayer. Oh, thou blessed Lord of glory, tender shepherd, thou who dost know us and see us and understand us. We thank thee that thou art above and beyond all circumstances and conditions, all failures and weakness, all inadequacy and impotency.

Thou art willing to be to thy people everything thou art, as over against everything that they are not. Grant just now that in this closing sacred moment that there may be everyone here that bids thee come into the ship of their life and just take over. Art so willing, so ready.

The great can be the triumph and the victory that will come. It will allow thee thus to rule. Seal thy word to our hearts.

Let it be upon us as a fragrant bouquet of truth, as a clear light to guide us to thy south. Lead us into thy all-ethereal corners, Father. Now may thy grace and mercy and peace be and abide and continue with us now and until we meet again.

In Jesus' worthy name. Amen.

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