

We're coming to the end of another school year. And you know what that means? Tests, lots of tests. Here are some real answers to real test questions. "What ended in 1896?" (**picture**) 1895. I like this one, "Where was the Declaration of Independence signed?" (**picture**) At the bottom "Briefly explain what hard water is." (**picture**) ice. "To change centimeters to meters you _____" Take out centi... now that's creative.

I never liked tests. How many of you hated tests? (Raise your hand) How many of you liked tests? (Raise your hand) Note those people, we'll beat them up on the way out today.

But tests are important. Would you want a surgeon who went to medical school yet never took any tests? No, you want to know if he mastered the material. The same is true with pilots or plumbers, fire fighters or nurses.

Jesus has just finished His lecture series. He's taught the disciples about the evidence of truly listening – seed bears fruit...you do what He taught, you don't just listen to it. Now it's exam time, Luke 8:22-25 (p. 865). What grade would you give the disciples? C maybe a D.

Testing is a vital part of the Christian life. James 1 says, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness" (vss. 2-3). Do think of tests as joyful? I don't. I like smooth sailing, calm seas.

God always has a purpose in the test. We must realize faith must be *tested* before it can ever be *trusted*. It's one thing to learn a new spiritual truth; it's quite another to practice that truth in the arena of life. This is a fallen world. Everyone has pain and sorrow. But for the believer, there's a purpose. The tests grow our faith, even when we like Job, don't understand.

Sometimes we feel like Charlie Brown (**picture**). Charlie Brown built a beautiful sandcastle. He'd worked on it for hours. Finally, he stands back, looks at it. It's wonderful. Just as he's admiring it, a storm comes up and wipes out his sandcastle. Now he's standing where his beautiful masterpiece was, on level sand, saying to himself, "I know there's a lesson in this, but I'm not sure what it is."

We may not know what the lesson is, we do know Who the teacher is. Storms can be miserable, yet we learn lessons through the storm we'd never learn if life was always smooth sailing. Our faith is not just to get us to heaven when we die. It teaches us how to live in the here and now, especially when life becomes stormy and the waves come crashing in.

This is the second nature miracle in Luke's Gospel and Jesus' greatest nature miracle. It demonstrates His protection of His disciples, as well as His authority over all creation.

Mark it down. Storms are coming. Are you in the midst of one today? Do you feel like you're sinking? Even if you go through the worst storm, the child of God is never alone. In the boat with him or her, just as He was with the disciples on that day, is Jesus, **The Perfect Storm Calmer**.

The lesson we must learn...usually over and over again, is that we can trust Jesus. In the midst of crashing waves and roaring wind, we're totally safe as long as we're in the boat with Jesus. Since He is Lord of all, we can trust Him even in the midst of the raging storms of life. That's because...

1. Normal life is a myth. Do you pray every time you get behind the wheel of your car? When you head to the store or even on a trip, do you give it a second thought that you're driving in a 2000 pound piece of metal moving at 70 mph and will be mere feet from hundreds of other 2000 pound pieces of metal also going 70 miles per hour?

"One day [Jesus] got into a boat with His disciples, and He said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they set out, and as they sailed He fell asleep." Several of His disciples are professional fisherman. Sailing a boat some five miles to them is like driving to the store. It's just a normal part of life.

When you listen to the radio in the morning and hear the traffic report, it's not unusual to hear about a fatal accident. That poor individual left home that morning, just as you're preparing to do, never thinking he or she had mere minutes to live. Perhaps, their family said a perfunctory good-bye, never dreaming those would be their last words. **Normal life is a myth.**

Many Christians make the mistake of reasoning that just because they have Jesus in their lives, they're immune to trouble, crisis or problems. Some media preachers would have you believe if you have enough faith, you're basically invincible – your life will be full of health, wealth and prosperity.

One new believer held this erroneous belief and shared it with Bible teacher, Ron Dunn (**picture**), commenting, "Now that I'm a Christian, I know this is the end of my problems." Ron Dunn wisely responded, "Yeah, the front end!"

If you have an opportunity to read J.C. Ryle (**picture & quote**) on the Gospels, do it. He'll warm your heart. Ryle wrote, "If you are a believer, you must reckon on having your share of sickness and pain, of sorrow and tears, of losses and crosses, of deaths and bereavements, of partings and separations, of vexations and disappointments, so long as you

are in the body. Christ never undertakes that you shall get to heaven without these. He has undertaken that all who come to Him shall have all things pertaining to life and godliness; but He has never undertaken that He will make them prosperous, or rich, or healthy, and that death and sorrow shall never come to their family”

This storm scene is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). After a long day of preaching, teaching and dealing with crowds, it’s nearly evening. Jesus has His disciples secure a boat to go to the other side of what’s known as the Sea of Galilee. It wasn’t a large boat, probably just big enough for Jesus and His disciples. Luke tells the story with an extraordinary economy of words, yet with extraordinary vividness. These were familiar waters for His fishermen/disciples and Jesus is content to leave the details to their skill and seamanship. More importantly, Jesus trusted His Father, knowing He was as close to God by sea as ever He was by land.

It’s been a long day and Jesus is exhausted. While **Normal life is a myth, Jesus is so normal.** This is the only incident in the Bible that mentions Jesus sleeping. What a time to fall asleep! It’s not unusual for a boat like this to have a pillow where those who were not working could rest. But this isn’t some luxury cruise ship.

Sometimes we emphasize the deity of Christ so much, we neglect the humanity of Christ. Our Lord knew what it was to be hungry, thirsty, to suffer pain or be exhausted...just like us. When we pray, we can pray with assurance and comfort that Jesus as our great High Priest, understands and empathizes with our human experience. Hebrews 4:15, “*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*”

2. God uses storms in our lives to test and grow our faith. Do you recall this line from a famous song? “*Does anyone know where the love of God goes, when the waves turn the minutes into hours?*” Gordon Lightfoot (**picture**) sang it in his haunting ballad, *The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald*.

The Edmund Fitzgerald (**picture**) was a giant ore freighter, 729 feet in length, the largest carrier on the Great Lakes from 1958 until 1971. On November 10, 1975 the *Fitzgerald* was hauling a heavy load of ore to Detroit when it ran into a severe storm with thirty foot waves. Finally, as it looked like they were going to sink, Captain Ernest McSorley, sent out an S.O.S. At 7 pm, *The Edmund Fitzgerald*, disappeared from radar screens, sinking in a matter of minutes. It rests today on the bottom of Lake Superior, broken in two. All 29 lives on board were lost.

Mariner’s Church in Detroit holds a Great Lakes Memorial Service every November for those who’ve lost their lives on the Great Lakes. The church would ring its bells 29 times in remembrance of the crew of *The Edmund Fitzgerald*. When we lived in Detroit, I remember driving by the church on the day of the Memorial Service and how eerie it felt.

“*And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. And they went and woke Him, saying, ‘Master, Master, we are perishing!’*” Though the Sea of Galilee is only 5 miles wide and 13 miles long, it has a long history of terrible storms. It’s also 600 feet below sea level. Storms develop when cold air and warm air meet in this natural basin. Perhaps that’s what happened as they set out across the Sea of Galilee.

The few times I’ve flown and there’s been strong turbulence, it’s bothered me a bit. But it doesn’t rattle an experienced pilot. Can you imagine how terrible this storm must have been to cause experienced sailors to panic?

The statements of the disciples differ from one gospel to another. No doubt in the midst of their terror, all of these words were spoken...and more. Twelve terrified men are in the boat with Jesus. Each may have spoken at once, or perhaps in sequence, or a little of both. There’s a myriad of emotions and levels of fear. I’d encourage you to check them out for yourself in Matthew 8:25 and Mark 4:38. Matthew seems to record *a cry for help*. Luke seems to be *a statement of doom*. While Mark records *the rebuke of one or more* of the disciples for Jesus’ seeming aloofness.

But their biggest problem isn’t the storm. Their biggest problem is my biggest problem and your biggest problem – FEAR. Someone defined *FEAR* as *False Evidence Appearing Real*. Fear of the storm is usually worse than the storm itself.

When Germany began bombing England during World War II, England’s Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill (**picture**) said, “*We have nothing to fear except fear itself.*” He knew fear could do more damage than bombs.

Fear is deadly and dangerous. One Arkansas farmer kept losing hens to some nighttime predator. He suspected it was a fox so one evening, the farmer put his loaded shotgun beside his bed. When he heard a commotion in the hen house, he snuck out with his shotgun ready to fire. But he was wearing only his nightshirt and didn’t have a flashlight. As he approached the dark hen house, fear began to take over. He began to worry, “What if this fox is rabid? What if it bites me before I can kill it? What if it’s not a fox, but a wildcat?” He’s literally shaking with fear as he approaches the hen house. He pauses to listen and at that very moment, his trusty old hound dog, Blue, who’d crept up silently on his master, decided to show his affection.

Old blue stuck his nose under the nightshirt and “cold nosed” the farmer from behind. The farmer’s finger was on the trigger, and “KABLAM!” Thirty hens lost their lives that night. But it wasn’t the shotgun that killed the chickens—it was fear.

If you're not in the midst of a storm, you will be. Moments before, it was smooth sailing. Storms can blow up suddenly. When you're focused on the storm, fear controls you. You'll cry out for God to remove your storm. It's not our greatest need or what we need to do, or what Jesus wants us to do.

Are we like them? Have you ever felt like Jesus was sleeping while the storm is raging? Don't miss this! It's so encouraging! The storm doesn't wake up Jesus. The cries of His frightened, needy disciples do that. That's because a storm is no big deal to Jesus. He'll sleep right through it, but the minute your weak, fretting and faithless voice cries out to Him, He instantly comes to your aide.

Jesus is always ready to hear our prayers, to comfort us in our fear. Our Savior is always with us in the storm, though it may seem as if He's asleep or unaware. Often He waits until we're at our wit's end so that we sense how great our need really is. Even before the disciples called on Him, Jesus was with them in the boat, going through the storm with them. He promised, *"I will never leave you, or forsake you"* (Hebrews 13:5). Or, as Paul triumphantly affirms, *"nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom. 8:38-39).

One of my favorite stories from the Old Testament is the account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These three Jews obeyed the Lord and found themselves in the midst of a fire storm because they wouldn't worship Nebuchadnezzar's idol. In anger, Nebuchadnezzar has them thrown into a fiery furnace. As King Nebuchadnezzar peered into the flames, he's astounded and says to his officials, "Didn't we throw three men bound into the fire?" They responded, "True, O king." And Nebuchadnezzar responded, "Look! I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire. They're not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." (Dan. 3:24-25). The fourth man was the Pre-incarnate Christ. He didn't abandon those faithful men in their trial, but went and stood with them in the flames. He does the same for us. Whenever you're in a storm, Jesus is always there.

The disciples are being tested. What grade would you give them? A C or D? What grade would Jesus give us when we face our storms? Wonderfully...

3. Jesus is sovereign over every storm. *"And He awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm."* When I was in school, I had a friend who'd listened to a few too many sermons about miraculous responses to prayer. He and a group of a guys were to go to Milwaukee to serve in a church on a cold winter day, but their car wouldn't start. So he laid his hand on the hood and cried out to heaven, "Start car, start!" It still wouldn't start.

What we have here is a genuine and immediate miracle. One moment the ship is about to go down and they're all going to drown in the raging seas. The next moment they're floating serenely on the smooth surface of the Galilee. The storm ceased. The sea is calm. There's no natural explanation for this – only Jesus. When a storm stops, the waves will still rage for some time. But when Jesus commanded the winds and waves to stop, it's immediate – no aftershocks. Flat seas emerge from dangerous waves. *Why?* The same God who created the oceans, calms them with a word. The same God who caused it to rain and cover the earth in the days of Noah, turns the raging wind into a breeze. The same God who divided the Red Sea and later the Jordan River, and made a path for His people through the waters, now quiets the waters. As man, He slept; as God, He stills the storm.

Some Bible scholars believe this was a satanic storm, that Satan and the forces of evil were behind it. It's a common picture in the Old Testament. Ephesians 2:2 calls Satan, *"the prince of the power of the air."* It also explains why Jesus *"rebuked"* the wind and waves. The word *"rebuked"* is the same verb used when He cast out a demon. While the winds and waves were not evil, possibly what stirred them up was evil.

What we have here is a prequel. Tornados, hurricanes, tsunamis earthquakes, volcanos devastate our earth. We know mankind lives under the curse of sin but we forget all of creation lives under the curse of sin. Someday there will be no more storms. When Jesus returns and establishes His earthly kingdom, there will be a new creation.

Just as Jesus calmed this storm, He can calm the storms in your life. What are your storms this morning? What's raging in your soul? **Jesus is sovereign over every storm**, even the ones in your heart and life.

4. Our faith grows when we know who Jesus is. The key question of the Gospel of Luke is "Who is this? Who is Jesus?" The answer to that question is everything. There are two critical questions in verse 25. *"He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, 'Who then is this, that He commands even winds and water, and they obey Him?'"* Let's consider the second one first.

a. Who is this? The most amazing part of this miracle and what Luke wants us to see is the disciples' reaction to Jesus. When Jesus asks them why they're afraid, He uses a Greek word meaning moderately fearful. Yet, after Jesus calms the storm, the text says, *"And they were afraid, and marveled."* Here the Greek word for *afraid* means literally "they feared with great fear." In other words, they were sort of afraid in the storm...they just thought they were going to die. After Jesus calms the storm, they're terrified of Jesus.

Their fear of the storm is nothing compared to their fear when they realized Who it really was in the boat with them. It's one thing to be in the boat with someone you believe was sent from God to be a great teacher and spiritual leader. It's quite another to be confined in a small boat with the One you suddenly realize is God, the Lord of the universe. Your knees give way and you begin to tremble. You find it difficult to breathe.

The only thing they found more terrifying than the storm outside the boat was having the Creator and controller of the storm in it. What a great question: "Who is this?" Everyone must answer that question. Your answer makes all the difference in this world and the next.

b. Where is your faith? It does little good to know who Jesus is if you don't trust Him. Jesus is in the boat with us, sailing through calm waters and storms. But when the wind begins to howl, where will you put your hope?

Jesus gives us the answer in His question, "*Where is your faith?*" He's saying, "I was with you! I was here—why don't you trust me?" He's not suggesting they'll never have to go through a storm again. In fact, this is just the first of many—and that's the point, "Disciples, the only way you're going to make it is by trusting in Me. Believe who I am, believe what I can do, and trust Me, even when all the lights go out, even when nothing else makes sense. You won't make it unless you learn that." The choice of faith is absolute. Either we trust Jesus or we're left to the mercy of the storm. We must choose to trust Jesus even in the storms of life.

But how do we get faith in the midst of the storms of life? By listening to the Word of Jesus. Look at verse 22 again, "*One day He got into a boat with His disciples, and He said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side of the lake.'*" There's the key. Jesus said "*Let us go across to the other side of the lake.*" When Jesus gives a word, nothing will change it. In the midst of the storm, Peter, John or the others could have said, "Yes, it's bad. But Jesus said that we were going to the other side. Look at Him, see how calm He is, sleeping in the boat? Okay, let's keep rowing and bailing. Everything will be fine, because Jesus said, 'We are going to the other side.'" True faith trusts God *before* the storm, *during* the storm and *after* the storm.

Storms will expose our fear and doubt. Anyone can fake it in calm waters. We can impress others with how together we seem to be. The disciples could cope with normal storms quite well. They'd been in storms on this lake other times. They were experts at handling their boat in rough waters. At first they probably thought, "No problem, we can handle it." But this storm brought them to the end of themselves. It revealed how they were trusting in themselves. Often, a crisis shows us weaknesses in ourselves we're blind to. The Lord uses storms to reveal areas where we need to grow in our faith and learn to trust Him.

Corrie Ten Boom (**picture**), author of *The Hiding Place* and survivor of Nazi Concentration Camps, shared that people often came up to her and said, "Corrie, why, what a great faith you have." She'd smile and respond, "No, it's what a great God I have."

Our faith in the storms will point others toward the Lord. The more we trust Him in the storm, the more we'll know Him and be able to trust Him in the next one. Faith goes back to previous situations where God has shown Himself faithful and says, "He took care of me then, He'll take care of me now." We must go back to the history recorded in Scripture, where we read of God's faithfulness to His people in terrible situations. If you actively trust the Lord Jesus in your current trial, your faith will be strengthened to trust Him in the next one.

Conclusion: What the disciples went through on the Sea of Galilee is something we all go through in life: seas of difficulty...storms of trouble. People lose their jobs or suffer some financial hardship, and they get tossed by the waves of panic. They receive an unfavorable diagnosis or struggle with a chronic illness, and they're flooded with fear. They have painful interpersonal conflicts at home, in the neighborhood, at work, even in the church, and they feel like they're sinking. They lose someone they love and they're drowning in sorrow. Or, perhaps they're simply swamped with all of the little duties and difficulties of everyday life. We ALL must pass through the heavy seas of life's troubles. As Peter said—the same Peter who'd been in the boat with Jesus – "*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you*" (1 Peter 4:12).

This is true not only for the individual believer, but also for the Church. Since the days of the New Testament, believers have often used a ship as a symbol for the Church of Jesus Christ. The idea goes all the way back to Noah and the ark. It's also based on Jesus and His disciples out on the Sea of Galilee. This is a great encouragement, because it guarantees that even when the storm tide is rising, the ship of God's Church will not sink. Jesus is on board. No matter how fiercely the storm rages, we can trust that our Master and Captain will see us safely through.

Sometimes a well-meaning Christian alludes to this story and says, "With Christ in the boat, you can smile at the storm." Certainly, there's a sense in which that's true, but Scripture doesn't portray such an overly rosy picture. We need to squarely face the fact that sometimes Jesus doesn't calm the storm. Sometimes the boat sinks, even if we're trusting in Jesus. John the Baptist wasn't delivered from prison; he lost his head. Peter is miraculously delivered from prison, but James was put to death (Acts 12:1-17).

What should we do if we trust in the Lord, but our boat sinks? What if the miracle doesn't come? The answer is, "We trust in the Lord Jesus as we go under. We go down singing the doxology."

Some of you will recall the Scott Willis family. Recently, they were back in the news. Their son, Toby and his family, now have a show on TLC.

The Willises went through a horrible storm, one we never want to face. In November 1994, Scott and Janet Willis (**3 pictures**) were traveling with six of their nine children on I-94, south of Milwaukee when their minivan struck a piece of debris which had fallen off a semi. It punctured the gas tank and their minivan burst into flames. All six of their children died.

But the most astonishing recovery became apparent as Scott and Janet displayed their emotional and spiritual stability. Eight days after the accident the bereaved couple explained to the media how they could make it through such a sudden and horrific tragedy. They quoted Psalm 34, *"I will bless the Lord at all times: His praise shall continually be in my mouth. O, taste and see that the Lord is good."*

And then Scott Willis said, *"Janet and I want to praise and thank God. There is no question in our minds that God is good, and we praise Him in all things. God is a great God...We believe children are a heritage of the Lord. We thank God for six precious children: four rascally boys, a sweet girl, so much like her mother, and a little baby just beginning to smile and grow. We understood that they were given of the Lord, and we understood they weren't ours. They were His, and we were stewards of those children. And so God took them back. He is the Giver and Taker of life. We must tell you that we hurt and sorrow as you parents would for your children. The depth of pain is indescribable. The Bible expresses our feelings that we sorrow, but not as those without hope...What gives us our firm foundation for our hope is the Bible. The truth of God's Word assures us that Ben, Joe, Sam, Hank, Elizabeth, and Peter are in Heaven with Jesus Christ. We know, based upon the Word of God, where they are. Our strength rests in the Word of God. The Bible is sure and gives us confidence...We're not special people. We're sinners saved by grace. But we're not taking a short view of life; we take a long view of life. We realize that someday we'll stand before the Lord, and the things that are here will matter very little. God's grace is sufficient for everybody."*

How do you do that? How do you have that kind of faith? That perspective on life? You must know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. The storms are coming. Do you know Him? Do you know Jesus that way?

Friend, don't wait until the storm hits. Seek Jesus now! Trust Him as your Savior, your only hope for heaven. Trust Him daily in the big and small problems you face. Then, whether He instantly calms the storm or whether your boat sinks, you will know peace the world can't know, the peace that comes from trusting in Jesus, the Lord over all of life's storms.