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Stilling the Storm (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In "Stilling the Storm (Part 2)," Steve Gregg discusses the concept of God's faithfulness and goodness amidst trials and tribulations. He argues that Christians should not lose faith during storms, as God is in control, even if it may not seem that way at the time. Gregg also touches upon the topic of the mark of the beast, noting that it is not entirely clear what it symbolizes and how it pertains to God's purposes, but it nevertheless appears to align with some present-day policy agendas. Ultimately, Gregg stresses the importance of trusting in God's plan and being steadfast in one's faith during difficult times.

Transcript

Purposes of God are going to be fulfilled, and if you're going to be a part of that, then God is not going to let anything happen to you that will prevent His purposes from being fulfilled. On the other hand, if He does let something happen to you that prevents you from continuing in this life, then He has already fulfilled all the purposes He's going to in you. The point is, to wonder whether God cares because He doesn't jump to your aid at the moment you call for Him, is to show a lack of trust in Him as a person.

There are those who believe that faith means I trust God to do a certain thing, but I think faith means I just trust God. It's not that I trust Him to do this or that thing, I trust Him to do whatever He wants to do, but I trust Him to always do the thing that represents His care for me. I trust His concern for me, I trust His love for me, that even if I'm in a sinking ship, there's no place for me to begin to wonder whether God cares for me or not.

God, don't you care about me? That just shows how little they trusted God's attention and attentiveness to them. Jesus had told them things like, all the hairs of their head are numbered, and a sparrow can't fall to the ground without the father, and they're worth more than that. That's not the way they were thinking at the moment, though.

They had not really an established faith in God's goodness and God's care for them that was independent from circumstantial confirmation. I'm afraid there's a lot of Christians like that, too. As long as they're being blessed and their prayers are being answered and

they've got plenty of money and good health and so forth, well, then they have no problem believing God's a good God.

But let God take away something or bring discomfort or danger into their life to test their faith, and suddenly they fail the test because they just can't believe a good God would allow such a thing to happen to them. And their trust in His care and in His intentions and His motives is undermined. And that is where their faith failed them here, too.

They should have known, first of all, their expression of lack of faith was, one, don't you care? They didn't trust that God cares even when they're in a crisis. Secondly, we're going to perish. They didn't trust that God is going to fulfill His purposes in Christ and even His promises to them about their future destiny.

They were going to be leaders in His movement and so forth, but this had not really materialized yet. It's like, well, let's go on here. The parallel that I see in my own case is that the nations of the world are certainly raging at this moment against the Church.

How many of their designs they will be allowed to carry out, I don't know. The Bible says the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord. He turns it like the rivers of water whither soever He wills.

God is the one who's sovereign over the kings and the nations of the earth. And that is what I think is the symbolic thing behind this story. The raging of the sea, the seeming, you know, undesigned turbulence of the Gentile world, of the pagan world.

It doesn't seem to be controlled by anyone, but God is still in control. He can calm it with a word. Be still and know that I'm God.

I will be exalted among the nations in Psalm 46. And here, peace, be still and the waves have to obey Him. Now, I'll tell you one reason that this struck me today in a powerful way is that I have heard, I don't know if this is true.

I've been actually hoping to get some confirmation. I haven't been able to find anything in the news service about it, but I have heard that there's been, I heard that yesterday the senator, someone was going to vote on whether or not the United Nations referendum on the rights of the child was going to be accepted in this country. I don't know if you've read anything about this, but I think over a hundred nations of the world have signed on to it.

And it's a United Nations thing that if it's accepted by Congress, it will override the constitution of the United States. And there are certain things in it that override constitutional rights of parents to train their children in religious ways, because basically this United Nations thing forbids religious indoctrination of children. It forbids that you discipline your children, that is you can't spank them and so forth.

And you can basically have your kids taken from you if you do with your children what God says to do with your children is what it comes to. And this is something that I've been hearing a lot from Christians about. I don't know much about it.

I don't know, I haven't gotten any confirmation from the news services or anything like that. But I heard from somebody today that it was going to be voted on yesterday by the Congress as to whether the United States would adopt it. I mean, scores of countries already have.

And it would basically be granting rights to children that forbids parents to discipline them, to influence them toward religion. It gives children the right to reject the religion of their parents and to not have religion forced upon them. Well, you can imagine how that could be interpreted in actual case law.

And it basically overrides the constitutional right of parents to freedom of religion, freedom of speech for their kids and so forth. So it's kind of a thing that's got a lot of Christians scared. And I haven't been able to hear how the vote turned out or even if it took place.

I don't know. Not too long ago, some people were telling us, and you've probably heard about this deal, about this computer chip thing that they're talking about putting on the hand or on the forehead. Of course, a lot of people are identifying this with the Mark of the Beast in Revelation 13.

I have my skepticism about that identification myself. First of all, I'm not sure at all why a computer chip invisibly placed under the skin would be called a mark. I mean, it's not a mark.

It's not a visible mark. And it's not obvious why that would even be considered to be a mark, even in symbolism. But there are a number of Christians who are saying, oh, this is certainly at the Mark of the Beast.

And they point out that this chip is already being used on animals, that there's these people, there's this company that'll put a chip in your pet, and then if your pet gets lost, they can trace them anywhere because it's like a homing device and so forth. And they're going to put it in everybody's hand, everyone's forehead, and then it'll contain all the information about your whole life and so forth. And again, a lot of Christians are getting scared about that.

And I guess the thing that makes that scarier than the similar stories we used to hear about 20 years ago is that we have madmen in authority right now in this country. I mean, 20 years ago, people were talking about all these same things, laser tattoos on the right hand and so forth. Apparently that one washed away, and maybe this one will too.

But in those days, there was still a little bit of sanity, you know, in the government. And you knew that if someone really tried to impose that on the free world, that there'd be an outcry and the government would never stand for it and so forth, just because there was more sanity. And now, you know, you hear so much about the present administration and their agenda, it sounds like these ideas go right along with what they'd like to do.

What I'm saying is that these kinds of stories can put fear into Christians, in fact, succeed in doing so. But in my opinion, regardless of whether this is something that can be, you know, something that is happening or not, we're like the disciples in the boat, you know, in a turbulent world, a world that's threatening to sink it. You know, the world wants to sink the that.

But Jesus is in the boat. And we stand rightly rebuked if we allow ourselves to fear and say, Lord, don't you care? Don't you see what's going on here? You know, we're praying to you and we're saying, please stop the madness in the world and things aren't getting any better. And why aren't you answering our prayers? Awake to our help, oh God.

And, you know, that's fine. It's good to pray that way. We're supposed to pray.

The problem is when we pray and say, God, don't you care? Don't you care what happens to us? As if the nation's turning against the church is some kind of a new and unexpected development. As if this is something that somehow raises questions about God's faithfulness or God's goodness to this church. Of course, it's just the fact we're so pampered that makes it seem a strange thing.

Peter says, don't think it's a strange thing when you fall into these trials and so forth. Is there some strange thing happened to these fiery trials? This is just part of the package. But the story of the disciples in the boat is that regardless of appearances, regardless of how much the boat seems to be taken on water, if Jesus is in the boat, the boat is not capable of sinking.

Because Jesus has a destiny to fulfill with himself and the inhabitants of the boat. And there's no way the church is going to be destroyed. It may be driven underground.

That's happened before for many centuries. That would be a very common thing if it happened. But as far as the destruction and the end of the kingdom of God or of the church, it simply can't happen.

It simply can't happen with Jesus in the boat. And Christians who get all terrified because of the storm and because of the waves need to stand corrected and rebuked that this is lack of faith. Now, Jesus is the sovereign over the nations.

They do obey his voice, not willingly, but unwillingly. Assyria in the Old Testament, Isaiah chapter 10, is described as God's rod of his anger against Israel as the Assyrians came and conquered Israel and took off the inhabitants of Israel into captivity. The prophet

Isaiah speaks of Assyria as God's rod of anger against Israel.

And he says that he'll use Assyria to punish Israel. But then he says, however, he, meaning Assyria, does not mean it so. He just wants to swallow up nations, not a few.

And he goes on to describe how Assyria is not in the least obeying God in terms of conscious desire to do his will. Assyria is a puppet in the hands of God. Assyria is being used by God but is not aware that it's used by God.

It is not a conscious and willing servant of God, but it is God's servant nonetheless. And while Assyria boasts of its conquest, Isaiah the prophet says in Isaiah chapter 10, can the axe boast against him who cuts with it or the saw? Can a saw boast against the person who saws with it as if it were doing this under its own power? And so the Bible teaches that God is sovereign over the nations, even those nations that are in most overt, deliberate rebellion against him. That he raises up kings, he brings down kings.

And while we don't see that happen every generation, that is to say it may be many generations, that persecution takes place before God puts it down. For example, the first three centuries of the church were times of official persecution of the church. And many, many tens of thousands of martyrs were made by the Roman emperors.

But eventually God put that down. There haven't been any Christians fed to the lions in Rome for, you know, 1,800 years or something like that, or 1,700 years now. And, you know, God, there were several generations of Christians that didn't see his deliverance, but the boat stayed afloat.

The church remained. And while we may not, we might be in a generation that doesn't see the deliverance come, because it's the big picture that God's working on. It's, you know, generations come and go, but God's purposes still are going to be fulfilled.

We can see in a story like this that Jesus is the one who commands the waves of the sea, and that he can still them, and he does still them. And to be fearful is to be sinful. To be fearful is to be faithless, as he says.

Where is your faith? Why is it that you have no faith? Why were you afraid? That's a good question. Why would anyone be afraid if they believe in Jesus, if they believe in God's sovereignty, and so forth? So his sovereignty over the elements of nature in this story, I think, are a, they sort of are an emblem or a symbol of his sovereignty over the nations themselves, of those persecuting powers that make war against the saints, like the waves beating against the boat. But God is sovereign, and in his time, not when we think he needs to, but when he when he arises to do what he wants to do, it only takes a word from him to totally calm the sea.

Now, I want to make one other observation here, and it's becoming clear to me that from the time we're not really going to be able to get into the story of the man of the tombs,

as I'd hope this time we'll have to get into next time, but this is one of the very few times, I think only two, in the ministry of Jesus, where he spoke to and rebuked something that was not animate, something that was not a personal being, as near as we can tell. The first time Jesus rebuked something other than a demon or a person was when he, in Capernaum, came to Peter's house for the first time, and Peter's mother-in-law was sick of a fever, and Jesus rebuked the fever. Now, we don't see him rebuking blindness, or rebuking lameness, or rebuking other physical things, but on this one occasion, we read of Jesus rebuking a fever.

Likewise, we see Jesus here rebuking the wind and the waves. Now, the wind and the waves presumably have no personality, although God does rebuke the nations in the Psalms on many occasions, we read of it. Some of the Psalm numbers, unfortunately, I'm not able to immediately reproduce, but when we think of Psalm 2, for example, here's a case.

It says in Psalm 2, Why do the nations rage, and the people plot in vain? Excuse me, a vain thing, an empty plot. The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bonds in pieces, a little like the men of the tombs did, and cast away their cords from us. He who sits in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall hold them in derision, then he shall speak to them in his wrath and distress them in his deep displeasure.

Yet have I set my king on my holy hill of Zion, he says. Now, God speaks to the nations and says, Listen, snap out of it. He rebukes them and says, Listen, no matter what you may try to do to my holy one, no matter what you try to do to me or my anointed, I have nonetheless set my holy one upon the holy hill of Zion, my king, Jesus.

And so the nations are rebuked as they foment and agitate against the purposes of God and of Christ. He rebukes them even as Jesus rebuked the winds and the waves. Now, there is a possible other explanation of Jesus rebuking the wind and the waves, although they are not animate.

It is noteworthy that when Jesus got to the other side of the sea, there was a demon-possessed man, and not just an ordinary demon-possessed man. Jesus had encountered demon-possessed people before, but this case stands out. This man had a legion.

There were a lot of demons in this guy. A lot of them had been committed to this man. Why? Why so many demons in one guy? We are told that there was a legion of demons.

Now, we don't know the exact number of a legion, but if the word is taken from the Roman armies, that is, if the demon said, My name is legion because there are many of us, if the word legion was used in the sense that the Romans understood the word, a Roman army, a legion had 6,000 soldiers. That is fairly well attested by commentators that a Roman legion was 6,000 soldiers. Does this mean that there were 6,000 demons

in this guy? Maybe or maybe not.

They only say there were many, but there were 2,000 swine, and again, we are not 100% sure whether every swine was personally demon-possessed when the demons went into them or if just a few swine were and they got the rest stampeding, but I guess the impression one gets is that all the pigs became demonized, and there were 2,000 swine. So, although we are not told this in indisputable language, the impression is given that this guy had thousands of demons in him, and why would the devil devote so many demons to this one man? I mean, there are a lot of people out there for the demons to be distributed among. Why concentrate so much of his efforts on this one man? I don't know, but I will say this, the man became quite an evangelist after he was delivered.

He went and spread the news about Jesus throughout the whole Decapolis, and maybe there was something about this guy that the devil was particularly threatened about beforehand and maybe saw that this guy had tremendous potential for righteousness and for God and took advantage in his earlier years or something to somehow get him. We are not told how the man became possessed or what his life had been like. We don't know if he had been a great sinner or what.

In any case, the man had tremendous potential for the kingdom of God, and maybe the devil perceived that. I don't know. But the devil invested a great amount of troops in this one man to keep him crazy, to keep him antisocial, to keep him away from being taken seriously or from being associated with by people.

I don't profess to know the reason, but I think we can deduce that this was one of Satan's significant captives, one of his significant guys, when you got a legion of demons in the one man. And it is clear that as Jesus and the disciples were crossing over the sea, that they were on their way to an encounter with this man. And that encounter, certainly the devil must know, if Jesus would encounter this man, it would result the same way it had when Jesus encountered any demon-possessed person.

The demons were going to go. The man was going to be delivered. The man was perhaps, perhaps the devil could tell, the man might even become a great evangelist, which apparently he did.

It may be, therefore, that the storm at sea was stirred up by the devil to prevent this confrontation from taking place, to prevent Jesus from getting into a place where this man could get delivered by Jesus. The devil may have had a lot at stake in this particular individual. I can't say what, but just the fact that he's had lots of demons in him would suggest that the devil had more than ordinary stake in this man's life.

And so it has been thought, and some, I think Watchman Nee is the first person I ever heard suggest this, was that perhaps the storm at sea really was of demonic or satanic origin. Now, not all storms are. I seriously doubt that all storms are.

In the book of Job, however, once Satan got permission to take from Job all that he had, one of the things that happened was a great wind came down from the sky and knocked down a house that killed all of his children. I think we are to assume that Satan originated that wind, since we've just read that Satan got permission from God to bring disaster into the life of Job and to take from him his possessions. That wind apparently was sent by the devil.

Now, it would be quite a leap to suggest that all adverse weather conditions are sent from the devil. For one thing, the flood of Noah's day was certainly adverse weather conditions, but that wasn't sent by the devil, that was sent by God. I think that when we, you know, bad weather can be either from God as a judgment or from the devil or possibly just the result of natural forces.

It's not supernaturally in origin at all. However, the particular storm that Jesus stilled on this occasion by rebuking it may well have been stirred up by the devil himself. And that might account for the fact that Jesus rebuked it, speaking not to the wind and the waves themselves perhaps, but to the power that had stirred them up, to the demonic powers that were resisting him getting to the other side.

Now, this is conjecture, I can't say it's necessarily true, but one thing I would point out, and I should have maybe made this point a little earlier when I was talking about Jesus rebuking the disciples for the lack of faith. One reason the disciples should have had no problem and no fear and no lack of faith is because the story begins, the story of the storm begins in verse 35 with Jesus saying, let us cross over to the other side. When Jesus says, let's go to the other side of the lake, it should be assumed that if Jesus has determined to go there, they're going to get there.

God doesn't give commands, but that he enables you to keep them. He doesn't give commands that you will be unable to keep, that I think would be unreasonable. And while it is true that the commands of God are impossible to keep in our own strength, or at least many of them would appear to be, yet there is no command of God that we can't keep with his strength, with his help.

When Jesus says, let's go to the other side of the lake, he was giving a command to the disciples, take me across the lake to the other side. And that command in itself should have made them know that Jesus is determined to go to the other side. He's told us to get us there.

He will not allow anything to prevent us. If we obey him, he won't allow us to fail. He has stated his purpose is to get to the other side of the lake.

Now, using the analogy that I was given a moment ago, the boat being like the church, assailed by Gentile powers and pagan resistance and so forth, there is a sense in which Jesus has given a commission to the church, which the church will fulfill. When Jesus said

to the Jews, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation that will bring forth the fruits of it, that is a prediction. The church to whom the kingdom has been given will produce the fruits of the kingdom.

And Jesus said, this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world to all nations before the end will come. This is the task of the church and therefore we assume that this is a prediction of what the church will do. Has not happened yet.

At least, it hasn't happened to the full extent that the predictions would suggest. Therefore, the church cannot sink. When Jesus has given us a goal, let's go over to there.

Let's go to the other side. And we haven't reached the goal yet. It's going to be reached.

And he doesn't give any commands that are not capable of being obeyed with his aid, with his power. Therefore, that's another reason why it was quite inappropriate for the disciples to be afraid that something could happen to interrupt it. Jesus himself had set the goal of getting to the other side.

So, there's a number of probably scattered points there. The lesson to me from this story is really not so much about weather, but about politics. I mean, not so much about wind and waves as about nations and enemies and powers that are beyond our control.

Certainly, a person in a storm at sea or in the air feels totally like he's out of control of the situation. I mean, it's just, there's nothing you can do. The world, the waves, the winds, they're just so much bigger than you are.

And much of what's happening in the world to the church seems to be happening beyond our control. I mean, even though Christians, many of them, against my counsel, are getting politically active and going out and being lobbying and voting blocks and so forth to try to prevent things from going bad, they still seem to be bad. It's quite clear things are in God's hands, not our own.

And yet, there's no cause for fear. In fact, that's why. Because things are in God's hands.

There's never any reason to fear when God is in control. The thing to fear is our lack of faith. That we would begin to say, God, don't you care what's happening to us? Don't you care that we're perishing? Don't you care that the church has fallen on hard times? Where's your faith? Why are you afraid? He said we're going to get to the other side and we're going to get there.

The church is anyway. You and I may not make it there individually. I mean, in terms of we may not be alive at the time the church reaches its goal, but we'll reach our own end.

We'll reach our goal. We'll be with the Lord as long as he's with us. And that's, of course, the thing here.

He was with the disciples. And as long as Jesus is with you, there's no cause to fear, regardless what the circumstances are or how powerful the forces that are against you. Next time we will look at, we read it, but we'll have to look at it in detail, the story of the man of the tombs.

And so we'll save that for next time. Not because we don't have any time left. We have some time left, but we certainly don't have enough time.

So we'll stop early. You probably don't mind that at all. And we will take this one next time.

Yes.