



September 21, 2025
"Questions in the Storm:
Where is your Faith?"
Mark 4:35-41
Pastor Ken Stoesz

Good morning. Please open your Bibles to Mark 4.

We continue our series on "Questions in the Storm"—thank you, Noelle, for reading the story for us. Out of this storm, three questions emerge:

1. Jesus, do you not care?
2. Where is your faith?
3. Who is this Man?

But for today, we will consider question two—it's the question Jesus asks in response. When it comes to trials, suffering and storms of life, we are usually on the side of the prosecutor demanding that God provide us some answers for our troubles. That was definitely last week's question, 'Do you not care?'...And we saw that Jesus did care, he is good and was in full control of the situation.

This second question is quite difficult for us and is perhaps the hardest of the three. It was the hardest to hear then and the hardest to hear now. So, to warn you, these may be some difficult verses to consider.

This summer, I was with some friends and one of my friends told me a story. We'll call his name Dave, and he was with his wife—we'll call her Amanda. They were at a place—we'll call it Falcon Lake. They were in a boat, and they were having a great time with their two children. They were having fun, and the day was going really well. But all of a sudden, things took a turn: maybe the day went on a little too long and the weather got a bit colder, the children began to get hungry and tired and bit overwhelmed, and they just wanted to go home. And then, one of our blessings of our country, of our province, is we have mosquitoes. So, when the sun set, the mosquitoes came out. And so, Dave was about to dock the boat. There was a lineup of boats coming to dock in all at the same time. And Dave said to Amanda, "Amanda, you've got to put on your big girl pants. The next 10 minutes are going to be really hard. This is going to be really hard. I have no easy way to say this. This is going to be tough. Kids are going to be crying. Bugs will be crazy. But we have to get this boat on the trailer and then we'll get out of here. There's no time to complain. There's no time to say we should have done this or that or whatever. This is what's in front of us. We got to walk this through."

So, they did.

And so, I want to encourage you this morning as we look at some perhaps familiar passages on the issue of suffering and trials to put on your big boy pants, big girl pants. These are not easy passages, but these are really, really important for you and me to make sense of.

Jesus asks, "Where is your faith?" He doesn't coddle them, doesn't apologize, doesn't say, "Poor you." He turns the questioning on them, in essence saying, "I have plans even in a storm—can you trust that? Can you trust Me? Where is your faith?"

Hebrews 11:1-3 "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible."

When Jesus asks, "Where is your faith?", he is asking, "Are you looking at the things that you can see and perceive; the storms, the waves, as Albert put it; or are your eyes upon the one who rides in the boat with you?" Though he seems to be asleep, he is sovereignly in control of the storm that the disciples were in. Where are your eyes? Where are my eyes? Where are we going? Where is our perspective? This is a distinct difference between followers of Jesus and those who are not followers: how do you face storms in life? What lens do you look through?

Lens of faith—Tells us that trials, storms present reality as it is

Lens of faith—Preserves us in the storm

Lens of faith—Prepares us for eternity

Lens of faith—tell us that trials, storms present reality as it is

A biblical worldview reminds us of Romans 8:19-22 (the world is groaning because of sin). Since Genesis 3, the world has been filled with disease, disaster, and death because of sin in general. It is part of living in the curse of the fall.

I was in the emergency room at St. Boniface this week with my mother whose health has been declining recently. Shonet and I sat with her in this room filled with sickness, brokenness, and disease. We overheard a triage nurse giving the background to a gentleman my age who got into a fight with his girlfriend and then tried to end his life. At that moment, medical staff were pumping his stomach.

This morning, right now, is the funeral for Charlie Kirk who was assassinated last week by a young man who was living a gay lifestyle with a partner who was transitioning from a man to a woman. He didn't like what Charlie Kirk stood for and decided to silence him. Can't you feel the whole world groaning? Everyone asks, "Why is this?" Non-Christians ask, "Well, if God is so good, why is the world so messed up? Obviously, God doesn't exist, or if he does, he's sleeping in the boat."

But doesn't that reveal our human heart? We want to be the centre of the universe and for everything to work smoothly. If it doesn't, then there has been some great injustice and God (if he/she exists) is required to correct this. Who is God in that story?

When trials come, Isaiah 8 says the people will look around and see only despair and they will shake their fists at their king and God and be filled with cursing and rage.

The Bible tells us these things. **2 Timothy 3:1-5 "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money,**

boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.”

So let's not be surprised. If anything, we should be surprised it's not as bad as it could be.

Lens of faith—Preserves us in the storm

The second lens of faith, I think, helps preserve us in the storm. I think one of the most terrifying things about storms in our lives is we feel like we're going to drown. We won't survive that. How will I make it through that?

This is one of the reasons why I've asked folks to share testimonies over these few weeks—thank you again, Jessica and Albert. I'm really grateful for that. And in discussing the testimonies with them, I said one of the things you're going to help us do, whether we want to or not, is address our fears. Someone might say, “I have no idea how I would face it if I lost my spouse. I'd be destroyed.” Or, “If I hear the word ‘cancer,’ that's my number one fear.” You might be thinking, “I wouldn't survive it.” You just heard a brother in the storm. The waves continue to crash.

And I remember last summer, when Albert was at the St. Boniface hospital. It was one of the only times I've wanted to yell, shout—I'm a football coach. I like to yell and get excited about victory and doing things well. And I remember Albert being there in Emergency and the doctors coming in to tell us, “Say your goodbyes.” The infection was growing and it was rapid and it seemed evident that this was where things were going. And Albert—I don't know if he could lift his head at the time, but he raised a hand and said, “I'll see you on the other side.”

I'll see you on the other side.

I think this is the best thing ever said in an emergency room. The purpose of the emergency room is to get everyone better and healthy and to get them back to school life, home life. Yes. And we're thankful for the medical staff and we'll pray for them and encourage them. But a Christian worldview says there is another side. Don't let that be robbed of you.

Cancer is not the worst thing that can happen to you. It isn't.

When you look at the storms, you say it is. Oh, but there's one who rides with you in the storm. And it's his divine call when the storm calms— not if, when. That's up to him to decide.

But scripture gives us solid ground to preserve us in the storms. How am I going to ever make it through? How will I do this? Well, look at James 1:2-4. (Here we put on our big boy/big girl pants and look at these texts.)

James 1:2-4 “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

In Colossians 1, Paul says it is his goal to present everyone “mature” in Christ. Which implies that our maturing will come through suffering. He is refining, shaping, changing, molding. Even Jesus learned through suffering—Hebrews tells us he learned obedience through suffering. We are not above our master!

We often pray for this, but we don’t want the school of suffering. Yet it is through “trials of many kinds” that our faith is tested and produces perseverance. In other words—strength. “O Lord, give me strength.” How do you build muscles? Lifting weights. How does lifting weights produce muscle? It creates micro-tears that the body repairs and then gets “bigger and stronger.” That is how life works.

James tells us to consider it pure joy. Yet it is often considered “pure hell” when you’re going through it. Pure joy. Anyone?

What about **Romans 5:3-5? “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”**

One of the blessings of coming to Elmwood was I inherited some books from Sieg Wall, who was a pastor before me here. He has slowly been trickling some of his books into my library, and I find his notes and writing all over them. Anyways, this book is a series of letters written by John Newton to a young pastor. The book is called *Wise Counsel*. He writes this about 250 years ago, in the late 1700s. He’s writing to this young pastor who’s going through some real tough times. His wife is dying and he’s a young guy. He’s a pastor of a church. He’s got a young kid. So, here’s what John Newton says to him. It’s a fairly long chunk, so stay with me here.

John Newton: *“Trials, my dear friend, of one kind or other, to prove, exercise and manifest our faith, patience and grace, are as necessary to us, as weights are to a clock; if they were not we should [not] have them. For the Lord does not grieve us, for his own pleasure, but for our profit. I see so many, stumble and fall, who were once honourable in profession, that in my sober moments, and when I am sitting quietly by the fireside, any affliction of the Lord’s appointment, seems desirable and a mercy, if it may but be sanctified as a means to make or keep me humble and watchful. Some of my dear and once intimate friends, over whom I mourn, might, humanly speaking, have been flourishing to this day, if they had had more difficulties to grapple with. Indeed, I will not, I dare not, say, that my trials have been many or great, if compared either with my deserts, or with the lot of many others. Yet some I have known, and the flesh has felt them sharp, but perhaps I should have been ruined without them. The Lord has preserved you likewise, he has honoured you, and made you useful, and you are not*

ashamed to look either the church, or the world in the face. And I doubt not but in and by the school of the cross, you have acquired in a measure the tongue of the learned, to speak a word in season to them that are weary, and have been instrumental in comforting others with the comforts which you yourself have received from the Lord, and which perhaps you might not have received, if you had not known trouble. Let this suffice: Though we have been sorely thrust at, we have been helped. And, he who has delivered, and does deliver, is still able to deliver us. Still his arm is stretched out for our relief, and his ear is still open to our prayers. The troubles which every day bears away will return no more. And see, the end of all is at hand. The Lord helps us to wait and depend upon him, and soon all shall be well. In the mean time he knows our frame, remembers that we are but dust, and has promised to lay no more upon us, than he will enable us to bear. He will either diminish the burden, when too heavy or increase our strength to support it, which amounts to the same thing. Let us therefore praise him for all that is past, and trust him for all that is to come.” [with original punctuation and grammar]

It was Malcolm Muggeridge, British journalist and thinker, who wrote, *“I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have ever learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness, whether pursued or attained.”*

Don’t misunderstand this—there are many people who have gone through serious trials who have not come to trust in Jesus, and also there are plenty of people who have had a pretty delicate life and love him dearly. But trials of many kinds seem to be a primary means through which God works in our lives.

Scripture has overwhelming evidence that trials/storms are working for a purpose:

1 Peter 1:6-7 “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

In our trials as followers of Jesus, we mix rejoicing with grieving. This is a cocktail that is part of our thinking and our experience of trials. Why? Because we know it is working for a purpose. It is not random indifference. It is working to a purpose. It is refining us like gold being refined in a fire. Your faith in Christ is being tested and will be tested. Don’t be surprised by this.

Here, I’m just going to give you a smattering of verses.

- **James 1:3 “You know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.”**
- **In Job 23, “but he knows the way I take. When he has tested or when he’s tried me, I shall come out as gold.”**
- **In Psalm 66:10, “for you, oh God, have tested us. You have tried us as silver is tried.”**

- **Proverbs 17:3 "The crucible is for silver and the furnace is for gold, and the Lord tests our hearts."**
- **Isaiah 48:10 "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver. I have tried you in the furnace of affliction."**
- **1 Corinthians 3:13 "Each one's work will become manifest for the day we'll disclose it because it will be revealed by fire and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done."**

Again, this is not fun. This is why we need to put our big boy pants on, big girl pants on, listen to these passages to go, I don't consider this pure joy. This is very difficult and yet preserves us in the midst of it.

There's a picture from ancient Rome. I was going to show it, but the picture itself doesn't make a lot of sense. So, I'll try to describe it to you. It shows how grain was threshed, how they would separate it. One man seen in the picture is stirring up the sheaves of wheat, while the other is riding on a cart pulled by horses or other animals. On this pole, basically—it didn't have wheels, but it was a big roller, and the roller had metal and bits of stone on it. They would roll this roller over top of the wheat and it would crush it, and the crushing would separate the chaff from the pure wheat. This is the only way they could do it. The thing was called a *tribulum*. It's where we get the word 'tribulation' from. It would roll, press down, crush, and separate. And what would be left was the pure wheat.

I wonder how many of you feel that you are under the weight of a *tribulum* these days. Remember that the purpose of the *tribulum* is not to destroy the wheat, but rather, it is to separate the chaff from the precious grain. Michael Horton puts it well. He says, "So it is with the ancient farmer. So it is with God. The *tribulum* of life rolls over us and we ask and are asked, 'Where is your faith? Where is your faith? What are you trusting in?'"

We cannot be surprised. We know these things come and they do happen upon us. But we are invited to trust in a holy, good and sovereign God who understands the *tribulum* that we walk through.

Lastly, and I'll close with this, the lens of faith prepares us for eternity.

Prepares us for eternity. If trials and storms tell us anything, it tells us that we're not made for this life only. My mom this last week said, "I'm ready to go. I'm ready to die. I'm ready." And she's not despairing. She says, "I'm looking forward to something else."

Prepares us for eternity. That's what Albert said in the emergency room where so many are clutching for another reason or way to live a little bit longer. I'm ready to go be with my savior. He's prepared my heart. It's where I want to be. It's where I long to be. Romans chapter 8 says to remember our present sufferings don't compare with the glory that's yet to be revealed. There's a glory yet to come.

1 Peter 1:6-7 "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

When Jesus returns, your work, your faith will be shown for what it is. Will it bring glory to praise to him at the end or not? Well, what are you building your life upon? What are you hoping for? What are you looking at? Again, this is a tough question to ask, but have you taken advantage of the trials that you're in? Have you taken advantage of them? What I mean by that is we're so often like, "I just want to get out of this trial, this trouble. I want to, you know, be out of this."

I remember years ago working at summer camp and a friend of mine who had worked there for years, he got so fed up in one of the staff meetings because we were asking for prayer requests like, I have a cold, I have a stuffy nose, etc. We can pray for all those things. My friend said, "Man, I wish someone would just say, "Please pray for me that when my cold is over, because it will end, that I would rejoice again what it feels like to smell." That I would treasure that instead of just feeling I'm entitled to that all the time. That when sickness leaves my body, that I would rejoice in strength that I just assume I should always have. It's a different way of praying.

Take advantage of what you have and what you're in. If it's a trial, Lord, show me what it is. Ask me the hard questions. Where is my faith? What am I looking at?

Maybe it's time to pray, "Lord, open my eyes to see clearly what you're doing in the midst of this storm. How are you trying to change me?" You may be spending all your time trying to change your circumstances and everything around you, while the Lord is trying to change you. I thought I was a finished product. You're not. Not until Christ calls you home and he will finish that work. That's a hard question to ask. I want to point fingers at everybody and everything else around. Well, why not look at me? Look inside of you, of us.

The good news is the disciples were rebuked for their little faith. But Jesus stayed in the boat with them. You of little faith. I'm walking. I'm staying with you. He stays in the boat with them. You evaluate your faith and go, "Lord, I am actually terrified. I have no faith. If anything, it's a crumb. Made it to church this morning. Here I am."

He carries us. He takes the storms of life for us. He walked to the cross and stayed on the cross when everyone was saying, "If you're the son of God, if you're this great guy, come down from the cross. Call the angels to come rescue you." He could have, but he didn't. He stayed on the cross to pay for your sins and mine. All that brokenness that we read about earlier on, he died for that. That's why he came.

And he stayed in that boat with those disciples of such little faith. Don't leave here this morning and go, "Okay, I need to pull up my socks and have better faith." How about you do this? How about you just trust in Christ who's in your boat, who's in your life to calm the storms, to preserve you, to prepare you and to walk with you and to use you.

At the end of the day, it will all be refined by fire. What will be shown? Will you have you been building your life upon precious stones that are just from this earth or from precious truths and promises of Christ? That will be shown in the end. 2 Corinthians chapter 4 says, **"So we don't lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our**

inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

Included in those things that are transient are our storms.

I'm going to close the service here and I'm going invite the worship team to come on up. The service is going to end a little differently than last week. I want you to remain seated and they're going to play instrumental music. I'm going to give you a gift this morning—I'm going to give you the gift of time. I know it's a long service and if you need to go, blessings, but I'm going to give you the gift of the next few minutes to sit quietly, listen to this song, listen to the music, and ask yourself a couple questions.

Are you in a storm? Well, what is it? What is it? Are you looking at the waves all around you? Or are you looking at the one who's in the storm with you? Are you coming out of a storm? How are you making sense of what you came out of? And thirdly, maybe you've had just an easy ride. How is the Lord preparing you for storms yet to come? Where is your faith? As Jesus asks, where is your faith? Is it upon all that what you see or upon that which you cannot see? There we will find our hope and our strength in Christ.

So the worship team will play for us. I'm going to give you just a few minutes to quietly think about that. Confess sin. Take the opportunity to set your eyes upon Christ and not on your storms. Kids, you can join us in this too. Then I'll close our service off and invite you, if you'd like, to stay for prayer at the end of it. So, take a couple minutes, music will just play. Stay seated, please. And take this time to reflect, not just jump into the next thing. Let's take advantage of the time.

*Father, I commit these next couple minutes, that your Holy Spirit would minister to each one here, those who are in a storm or trying to make sense of a storm or those who are preparing for a storm. Lord, I ask that you would lead us in confession. Show us where our hearts lie. Show us where we've been believing our fears. And teach us to trust in you, Lord, our mighty savior.
Amen.*