

John 6:14-21

"Sometimes Jesus Sends Us Into The Storm"

Two weeks ago I had my wisdom teeth out - all four of them - and I was going to come and solicit your emotion. I wanted you to feel bad for me. And then Jack had a stroke. So what do you do with that? (Laughing)

How are you guys? It's good to worship on a Wednesday night. The Lord is doing a great work in our lives. We can anticipate what He has in store for us. I'm greatly privileged. We spent ten years in Whittier. When Marie and I got married, we moved into Uptown Whittier; raised our family for ten years. Marie grew up in L.A. in the Bell area; I grew up in Cudahy. We met at Bell High. We did things a little bit backwards, not walking with the Lord. We had a child as teenagers, and then our life was a mess. And an old friend of mine invited me to Calvary Chapel in Downey. And I told him, "I want nothing to do with God or church. I'm not that bad." But I was that bad and worse. I would say, as we would sing in the hymn, I was a wretch, and God saves wretches like me. And so we were saved there within a week of each other, born again at Downey; spent eight years there serving in various places in leadership there, and then moved out to Aurora, Colorado. Unfortunately, Aurora is known now because of the theater shooting. The theater shooting greatly affected our city and our country. It's right up the street from our church, not just a few minutes - the theater's in the mall where we are, and so been there for seventeen years. This July will be eighteen years we've been there pastoring and loving. And we really got to know Pastor Jack when we opened a radio station. Growing up here, KWVE is how I was discipled for the most part. I was commuting all over southern California, so KWVE played a very integral part in my discipleship, and that was a little bit of a seed that I took with me to Denver. Little would I ever know that God would entrust to us not one radio station but two radio stations that cover about 80% of Colorado's population; and so it's very much like a KWVE in Colorado and around the world through technology. But we got to meet and get to know each other, and then I ran into him in Israel. He's just such a nice guy. You guys are so blessed. Except I haven't ever seen him mad yet, so I don't know. Who's seen him mad? Oh. Oh, okay. Let me write that down. (Laughing) Let me write that down. So thank you for the privilege of being here. My wife, Marie, is here; my daughter, Katie; my son, Josh, is somewhere. He's in the foyer. If you guys all want to turn around and say hi to Josh, he's right there. Like Pastor Jack mentioned, we're here to teach at the Downey Conference (coming

home); so it's always a blessing to be here because all we have is tonight. Just what the Lord is giving us now. And so we're going to talk about the topic of trials and tribulations and what God does through them. So I hope you're ready.

So, Father, we ask for Your Holy Spirit to be made known among us today. We recognize that You alone are the Teacher in this room, and You use the mechanism of humans because You connect humans to humans. But the real work, the real understanding, the real grasping of the reality of Your truths is done through the supernatural work of Your Holy Spirit. So, God, we invite You to continue to envelop us and develop us. We're so grateful for the young people who were exercising their spiritual gifts in leading us in worship. Bless them, Lord. That song that we sang about the prodigals and the kids running away and turning away is real. It's not unreal. It's super-real. The enemy is working overtime, as You know well, God - more than we even know, to rip our kids off. And so we just pray for the kids and are so appreciative of the next generation and the next generation, as the ministry is handed down. And now we turn our attention to Your word, and we ask, God, even as we are so grateful to see Pastor Jack and Debbie here, and we know - ten days ago, we weren't sure what was going on, we weren't sure the significance of it all, and now just ten days You reveal great progress. And we just pray for progress in his development, and he gets his strength back up and prepare to serve You in this congregation. So, God, we are here and ready to hear from You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Take your Bibles, open them to John's gospel, chapter 6. It opens up with a compassionate Savior. His disciples are tested, they're drawn into maturity. And then there's this satisfaction from the presence of the Lord in chapter 6. In the beginning of the chapter, you have about fifteen thousand people that are fed supernaturally by the Lord. They weren't expecting. And oftentimes that is exactly the work of the Lord. They weren't expecting to be fed, they weren't expecting to be satisfied. But that's exactly what Jesus did with them. And He used that kid. And sometimes the kid is overlooked in the miracle (beginning in John 6) because who is he? Just a kid giving up his food. But as a kid, in relationship to the disciples and to Jesus, he gave up everything that he had. He didn't give up a portion of it. He didn't give up just one and keep one for himself. He gave up everything that he had. All that was of value to him in the moment, he gave at the request of the Lord. And, as he offered everything, he received so much more. You know, it's not the topic of our time today, but I believe the Lord would speak to some today that that holding back from Jesus in your life - whether

it's holding back your finances, holding back your time, holding back your commitment - is only going to hurt you and the body. It's only going to bring pain to you and to the body. But that which you give up, you get in return and so much more. So the kid was going to have a little snack that day. But instead he, like the rest of them, was overflowing. He was so full. The idea of the word in Greek is he was gluttoned; he was overwhelmingly full as he gave himself to the Lord. It's so wonderful. God wants to touch people in our community. He wants to minister to them. He wants to help. He wants to meet needs, drawing people to true salvation. But not only that. We learn in the beginning of John 6 as the five thousand (fifteen thousand) are fed - not only that - we learn that He wants to use us. That is the method that God uses; the method that God uses - He uses people to reach people. And it usually begins with those that are closest to us, and then the circle widens around. But that's the work of the Lord. Now it's true, and we have to acknowledge this, God doesn't need any of us in order to accomplish His will. As a matter of fact, as we read through the Scriptures, we can see that God could probably get a lot more done without us than with us. And indeed He does - many times. He works around us, and He works without us because He's sovereign, and He just does that. He loves to bless people. But the way that He blesses, most often, is by using people to reach people - even though He doesn't need us. We're replaceable. I'm replaceable, you're ..... I think in real simple terms. I'm not in Colorado right now, and I haven't been since after services on Sunday. I'm not there. I'm a thousand miles away. But, being in contact with people, everything's fine. The Lord's doing a great work without me there. He doesn't need me there. He didn't need me there before I moved, and He wouldn't need me if I chose to leave. I'm replaceable. And yet He still chooses to use me because He loves me. He loves you.

And here's what it comes down to. We can come to the Lord (this is just kind of an intro in the chapter) today and say, "God, I don't have much to offer You. I don't have great talent. I don't have great skill. I've actually made a mess of my life. But I'm willing to offer You what I have, and here are my resources. Here is my time. Here's my ability. Here's my future. I give them all to You." No matter what your age is, it's so easy to write ourselves off. You know, the Bible says in Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus," and the enemy is a condemner and a liar; he's an accuser of the brethren. But we, too, can do the greatest damage to ourselves by condemning ourselves and beating ourselves up and looking and focusing in on our failures and our weaknesses instead of the greatness of who God is. And He is wanting to work in our lives.

Bring what you have. Bring what you have, and watch God not only work with you but miraculously use what's left over. Because we know at the end (there in chapter 6), we see that they left. "They" (in verse 13, notice) "gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves." And that was twelve baskets - one, I believe, for each apostle walking away with the leftovers of the provision of God to match their lack of faith, to match their, "Get these guys out of here. We don't have time for them. So much going on. We don't have enough food." All of that, they walk away carrying a basket, no doubt, saying, "Man, look at the faithfulness of God. More than we need."

Now, after the feeding of the five thousand (of the fifteen thousand or so people), let's pick up in verse 14, and let's look at this next scenario in the life of the disciples. It says, "Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, 'This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.' Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone. Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, got into the boat, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was already dark, and Jesus had not come to them. Then the sea arose because a great wind was blowing." You might want to mark those words "a great wind." You like to write in your Bibles? "A great wind," because "a great wind" is coming, "a great wind." And so here He says, in verse 19, "So when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near the boat; and they were afraid." Why were they afraid? Just because of "a great wind" and a storm. These are experienced fishermen. Sometimes we read these true Bible stories, and we just kind of read them through. But I want to ask you just to put yourself in that moment. Put yourself in that moment. You just experienced such a great miracle, amazing. You might even be a little bummed out because the Lord's schooling you, and you're walking away. You're thinking, in the back of your mind, in your inside voice, "We could never help them. We could never serve them." And just moments later, you're walking away with a basket full of leftovers after everyone (all of the thousands of people) was able to eat to the fill, as much as they wanted. Then Jesus, He departs; He needs to get some time alone with the Lord, with His Father, in prayer. They get into the boat, and "a great wind" - it's so great that it's stirring up their emotions. And by the time Jesus comes to them after hours, they're afraid. In this time, there's this charged-up expectation for Messiah to come. Everyone has their hope spent and focused on the coming of the Lord; especially around this time, in Passover season. They wanted to be - the children of Israel, the nation of Israel - out from

under the yoke of Roman oppression, so their mind, when it came to Messiah, was a political savior. "Surely the king will come and overthrow the current politics of the day." And they then, like many today, have it wrong. They have it wrong when it comes to Jesus. Everyone - people mistakenly thought Jesus had come to overthrow the government, to rule and reign right then and there. But that wasn't the purpose of His first coming. The purpose of His first coming was for the forgiveness of sins. It was to break the yoke of bondage of sin once and for all. As John the Baptist announced Him, "He's the Lamb of God that" what? "takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) - your sin and mine.

In verse 18, we have something very instructive. It's a storm on a sea because "a great wind was blowing." The Sea of Galilee is really more of a lake than it is a sea. It's about fifteen by eight miles. Those of you that have been to Israel, or you're going to Israel, you know it's just a gorgeous area. You can tell why Jesus made it His headquarters, around the area of Capernaum, especially when you compare it down south by Masada and the desert. It's like this is gorgeous, this is lakefront property, and it's just a beautiful place. But the Sea of Galilee is surrounded by hills or mountains, and the wind would come in and just whip up storms. There was a time on one of the trips that we have taken that just the week prior, there was such a large storm that the boat that we used to go out in the middle of the Galilee and sing and worship together and study the Bible, they had these huge wooden things they tied the ropes on - they were huge - they snapped like toothpicks because of the storm that was coming. I mean, storms come very rapidly and very quickly. And in the disciples' minds, they just finished a mountaintop experience of the faithfulness of Jesus, and it wasn't but hours later that "a great wind" arose.

That is the sum and summary of our lives. You just never know when "a great wind" will be blowing. You just never know. So much so that you can't prepare for it. You can't anticipate it. You just know, when it comes to trials and tribulations, that they're real, that they're common, that they're frequent - so that anyone in this room, we're in one of three categories. We are either in the storm of our life right now (maybe watching in on the internet). The storm is so monumental in your life that you don't even have enough strength to come into the sanctuary, and so you open up your iPad or you open up your computer and you go, "I want to draw near to the Lord, but I can't make it in." You're either in the middle of a storm right now, or some of you have just come out of one. You're just like, "Amen, we just came out of it!" Or, if you're not in one or you just came out of one, there's one coming. It's the cycle of life. And even these seasoned fishermen - that which they had

under control, that which they thought that they knew what they were doing - God allowed a storm to come to reveal to them that they really have a lot to learn, as you and I do as well.

Well, effectiveness comes to us through trials and tribulations; or what we're going to use today - the storms of life. It's a great picture - storms of life. Something can be calm, blue skies, sun shining, birds chirping - and then a storm comes and just seems to envelop everything in its path, and you begin to forget about the blue skies and the birds chirping because of the development and the difficulty of the development that God has allowed in our lives. And there are storms in this life. Storms that we bring upon ourselves - our own bad decisions; storms, often, that we face that have been brought on by someone else and their bad decisions; or the circumstances of life in a sin-sick world. But some storms are from the Lord. If you're taking notes, you really should write that down. Some storms are from the Lord. He allows them, He sends them. Jesus sent His disciples into the middle of the Sea without Him. He went up to the mountaintop to pray, and He moved His disciples on, and they went on without Him. And didn't Jesus know that the storm was coming? Yes or no? Yes He knew. He knew full well. And His counsel wasn't, "Okay, you gotta understand, guys. In about an hour or so, you're gonna go out on the water, and the largest storm....so this is what you need to do. You need to take this experience, and you need to do this, and you need to go around the edge, and you kind of go around. And if you guys help this, and you ....." He didn't set them up. He sent them off. It's going to be a life experience for them. Jesus knew the storm was coming, and He sent them out anyway. Why? Because they were safer in the will of God, in the middle of a storm, than outside of God's will on the shores of life. They were safer in the middle of a storm, in His will, than to try to skirt around it and avoid it and hang out on the shores until the storm passed.

As we read through the Bible, if you're taking notes, we find many types of storms that come into our lives. And I want to give to you a few of them - that you can know what's going on to some degree when you face it. I'm thankful to a pastor who shared this, and I'm developing it for us today.

Number one - first of all, we face correcting storms, storms that correct. Remember Jonah? When he was called to preach the gospel to Ninevah? It was a correcting storm where a great fish was sent to swallow him up and get him back on track. We can't escape the will of God for our lives. Sometimes these correcting storms are brought upon ourselves by our own sinful actions. God wins every time.

And we learn from Jonah, of all of the people in the Scriptures, it's not wise to run away from God. And it's not wise to run away from God's will for your life. He will get you back on track, and sometimes He uses circumstances to correct our direction, to get us going from one direction to another.

Secondly, there are perfecting storms. Perfecting storms. God allows these into our lives to teach us a lesson, to perfect us. Or another Bible word for that is "sanctify" us. Or we might even refer to it in our classes. We have classes at church - we call them discipleship classes. Well, sometimes storms are the classes of life to grow you up. Joseph went through a number of storms in his life - from a young age - setback after setback, difficulty after difficulty. And nothing in the Bible really indicates that it was the result of any of his disobedience. It doesn't indicate that there was anything - I mean, he was a kid, and his brothers were jealous of him, but for the most part there wasn't any wickedness in his life, there wasn't any rebellion. But that brother went through it! One after another after another, even to the point of being forgotten - in prison, falsely accused of rape, of a sex crime that he never committed! And yet, Joseph was the model of godliness and righteousness. But no matter what he was going through, God was making him into that person that God wanted him to be. Would he even have any idea? Could you even possibly grasp that what was happening in Joseph's life, throughout those years, those early years, was preparing him to be second-in-command over literally the entire world, to be the instrument to save the children of Israel because of his wisdom of putting food away and being there to receive his brothers? You would never ..... I know we go through things, and people come, and they want to encourage us. And God might even give them a word, like a supernatural word of encouragement. But we are so down, it's so difficult, that it's hard to even receive encouragement in trials. It's hard to understand, "How could God possibly use this in my life? How could He?" Some of you have that question. You came to church today with that question. And talking about storms is not - trials, difficulties - some of you, you've come to gather today to escape that; that that's one of the reason why you come to church. "I'm just looking for an encouraging word." And the Lord has an encouraging word in teaching you.

But you have that question of "Why? How could God possibly use this?" I get it, man. I'm with you. I understand to some degree, the depth of that question. It wasn't just almost four years ago - in May of 2013 - that we received a phone call that our adult son, Eddie (whom we had as teenagers, ended up getting married because of God using that little guy to keep us, at least, talking to each other -

Marie and I), collapsed. Twenty-six years old, healthy young man, police officer, very successful in his young life. Like all my children, the type of kids that make a dad proud. And from that collapse, he went into a coma and didn't wake up, and he passed away into eternity. And it was a storm with a bunch of other storms that we had faced that we don't have time to go through. Four years - I still ask the question, "God, how are You going to use this?" I mean, I've seen Him use it. I miss my boy like crazy. Miss my grandson like crazy. I mean, I look at that, and I see the fruit - as I get to share testimonies and I get to watch God use the testimony of a lost child and bring glory to Him. But, man, if I was like Joseph, I'd be like, "Man, I don't know, Lord!" I mean, it's real for you to say to me, and we could talk today, "Man, I don't want any trials in my life." I think it's really dumb people trying to take the devil on and say things on TV - so-called Christian television - "Devil, I'll take you on." Man, that's just so dumb. You want to be abiding in Jesus Christ, that place of safety. But I totally get it. You're not a bad believer because you have questions. You're not some substandard follower of Christ because you have been so cut to the heart with pain and sorrow - whether it is grief or the dissolving of a marriage or the prodigal kids. I mean, we didn't raise our kids to walk away from the Lord. We didn't raise our kids to just somehow be so enamored by the world that they get ripped off for a season or even longer. We didn't ask to be laid off. We didn't ask to have those neighbors move in or whatever the trial might be. That "great wind" is relative and specific to you and to me. But it's going to come, and you're going to be smooth sailing on the lake, and you're going to be out just enjoying it, and then the "great wind" comes. And before you know it, man, it's just fighting and rowing. It says (in verse 19) they rowed about three or four miles. This was not like they do in the Olympics, man. They're rowing for their lives! Every ounce of their energy is for the next row, the next stroke. And life can be that way. And yet, through it all, we learn that God is perfecting us. Here's what the Bible says in Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren." I believe God would send me here today to remind you (and me) that He's perfecting us. We're becoming more and more like Jesus Christ. That's the end goal. The goal is to become more like Christ.

Let me give you a third storm. Not only are there correcting and perfecting storms, but there are also protecting storms. Storms to protect us. This is what the disciples, I believe, are going through right here - a storm designed to keep

them from something worse. Protecting storms are used to protect us from something that would surely hurt us or harm us or might even destroy us. I mean, sometimes a setback comes. Sometimes a setback comes - a serious one and a painful one. It might seem like a huge setback, but, in reality, it's the best thing that has ever happened to you. Maybe you would never have gotten that new job had you not lost the old one. And it could be that the new job is exactly where God wants you to be. Maybe you wouldn't have gone after that new ministry opportunity or even begun to pray in that direction if the Lord hadn't closed that door - even with difficulty. Whenever you're within a fellowship family long enough, and there're people around, and people rub up against each other - sheep are sheep, and we're all creating friction - sometimes difficulties come, even within the context of a fellowship family. And you might be so discouraged because God closed a door, so discouraged because this is happening - and discouragement is real, and it's a real emotion, you should feel that - but understand that God has something up ahead for you. The discouragement's not going to last forever. And sometimes it's difficult things that God would use to move us in another direction. God could be protecting you by allowing you in the midst of a storm, and what might seem like a setback today may actually be a springboard to something greater tomorrow. And here are the disciples in the middle of a storm, after a wonderful, incredible miracle that they got to be a part of. It wasn't just something that they watched, but it was something they participated in, and they went from (what we like to talk about) the mountaintop experience (man, it's just so great and so grand), and they go right into a storm. And yet God, what is He doing? He's discipling and building them and causing them to cry out for help. Their faith is being built. Things are getting harder and harder. The concern is rising. All of the things that they know to do - at least the fishermen in the group - to deal with storms is not working. And isn't it true that God will bring you to the end of yourself? That's the place where He wants us to be - to the end of ourselves. Because we're not as smart as we think we are. We don't have all the answers. We don't know everything. And so God will allow us - He'll protect us, He'll use storms enough to protect us from our own prideful arrogance, thinking that we know it all. "I've been through storms before, and I've been through that, and I ....." Hey, you've probably been through a lot. But whatever you're facing now requires absolute dependence upon Jesus Christ, just like the last one. And just like the last one. And if God would allow us to be in another, here they are having their faith built up for hours, for hours. And in the midst of the storm, and in the midst of the rowing, and in the midst of the chaos - it's no small thing - where's Jesus? Well, we learn back in verse 15 He's up on the mountain by Himself alone; which we often find Jesus doing - getting

alone with the Father. And I'm sure He was praying for them. I can almost picture Him with one eye open, watching them as He was praying to the Father. They couldn't see Him, but He could see them.

One of the things I picked up over the years, especially in the last few years, is sometimes storms and trials feel like you're in a fog. You know the early-morning fogs you wake up to, and it's not just a mist, but it's a deep fog? And when you're driving to work in a fog, you don't speed up, do you? I hope not. Do you speed up? No! No. You slow down. And you don't put your bright lights on in a fog because the fog is like a reflection, it's like a mirror. It comes right back into ..... Well, we don't have much fog in Colorado, but we do have these crazy snow storms. It snows. I don't know if it's snowing right now, but I'm not there, so I don't care. But it's snowing, and I'm not a big fan of snow. If you guys are watching from Colorado, I'm sorry if you have a snow storm. Ha ha ha ha, I'm not there. (Laughing) And we just happen to schedule trips sometimes - we just get to miss these storms. I don't know if there's a storm or not, but here's what I've learned. When snow's falling - and you watch it on TV, "Oh, it's so beautiful, it's so pretty, it's so....." - it's not!!!! (Laughing) It's dangerous and icy and crazy. And you just don't want to go out in it. But it has the same effect as fog. But it's disorienting, actually. It's a little bit worse than fog because it's all falling, and the flakes are going all in different directions. And you're slowing down, and it's cold, and then the heat is on, then the window gets fogged up, and you lose your sense of everything except what's right in front of your headlights. And if you don't focus on that, you're going to be in big trouble. When we first moved there, I was testing things out because I didn't know, and they said, "Don't put your bright lights on," your high beams, "in a snowstorm." So I tried it. They're right. (Laughing) It's very disorienting because everything's going all the way around, and you're like, "Whoa, I just want to get home." And you don't know if there's any black ice there, you don't know if somebody in front of you is going to stop, you don't know if somebody's on the side of the road, somebody spun out. Recently Marie, my wife, was going to pick up my son at the airport, and she started to spin out, and it wasn't even snowing that much.

Here's a word from the Lord - when things get tough, slow down. I was so encouraged to see Pastor Jack here. I've been texting him, but I haven't talked to him since I got here. This is the first time I got to talk to him since it happened, and I was so encouraged to see him. But I was even greater encouraged when he said it's going to be about four or five weeks till he comes back. Because the

brother is a seasoned man of God, and he realizes - he doesn't need the doctors to tell him, although I'm sure he wants to push it - you've got to slow down, man, you've got to rest. You've got to let this go. You've got to let it ride. You've got to learn from it. You've got to grow. That's how life can be.

You need to remember that when you're going through a storm in life, and you begin to feel like God has abandoned you, He hasn't abandoned you. The Bible says, in Proverbs 15:3, "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good." It would be easy for the disciples here in the boat to imagine, with their vain imaginations, that Jesus doesn't care about them. It would be easy for them to think it's hopeless, and, "What are we going to do, God? Our Savior, the One that we put our hope in, has abandoned us." But He hadn't abandoned them. The Lord let them stay in that storm for a while - on purpose. He came, it says, "when they had rowed" (in verse 19) "about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea." Now He didn't walk on the sea at mile one or mile two. He walked on the sea at the exact time that He purposed. He's there on time. He isn't late. He's coming exactly when He sovereignly wants to be there and needs to be there. He didn't come to them in the first or the second watch, or even the fourth. Jesus shows up walking on the water, and notice it says (in verse 20), " 'It is I; do not be afraid.' Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going." What did He want from them? What did He want? I believe - we take it from the text - from the way the text is written, especially in verse 20, when He says, "It is I," what did He want? I believe He wanted them to want Him. I believe, and we see this in other places, Jesus' intent - after this miracle, after walking away with leftovers, after seeing, "Man, this is an amazing Man that we've cast our lot in with! This is unbelievable! Look what He can do. Look what He has done." And then they go right into a storm. What did Jesus want from them? What was the lesson? I believe He wanted them to want Him, and He didn't force His way into the boat. He waited. He waited for them to invite Him. " 'It is I; don't be afraid.' And then they willingly received Him into the boat."

Turn over to Luke 24. I want to show you one more thing before we head out. Now, Pastor Jack and I met with Pastor Jason before service. They told me what my time was, and I'm like, "Dude, then I'm going to have to cut my message in half!" And Jack said, "Yeah, you are." (Laughing) Look at this because Jesus is on the road with two disciples. They're discouraged, they're bummed out. They aren't certain. I want you to pick up with me in Luke 24:13. "Now behold, two of them

were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. And He said to them, 'What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?' Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, 'Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?' And He said to them, 'What things?' " Just drawing out from them. "So they said to Him, 'The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how" (verse 20) "the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive." Verse 24, "And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see. Then He said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?' And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

You know, it's a beautiful thing when Jesus meets you on the road, when you're discouraged and sad. And they lost hope. That's the scene of this particular journey. They are hopeless. And if there's something that's increasing in our culture today, in our nation in particular, is a rise of hopelessness. They don't mention that much on the news. You don't really see a headline story on Channel 7 that says, "There's a rise in hopelessness." Now they might begin to use that when it comes to politics but not really to the heart of the matter. But I'll tell you what to look for. I'll tell you what to look for in your local middle school or in your local homeless shelter or in the newspaper - however you get your news. I'll tell you what to listen for - to see the rise of hopelessness. And it's simply this - pay attention to the suicide rates. Pay attention to those that have come to the end of their rope, and their only alternative in their mind and their pain is to be done with life. Because that's the pathway that hopelessness leads you to - where you just don't see any way out; and the only way out is to get out. And it's such a painful decision on everyone that's left behind. Wherever you find suicide - I don't know how it is here because I don't live here anymore - but in Colorado, the numbers are

through the roof. It's a progressive series of bad decisions. But when we moved there eighteen years ago, it was a very conservative state. Not so anymore. And our leaders have felt that it's a good idea, now, to make marijuana legal - this gateway drug. And that's just wrecking kids. It's just step one. And when you see - again, you've got to dig for this kind of news - marijuana being legalized (they legalized it here recently, didn't they?) - you're going to see this, so pay attention to it, and be ready to serve. It's an open door to minister to some really hurting people. Marijuana use is going to go up. Heroin use is going to go up. Those two are going to go together because that's where the pathway goes. It goes all the way through. Sometimes it goes through marijuana, alcohol, prescription drugs, opiates. But eventually it's going to head toward heroin because it doesn't satisfy, and it builds in constant hopelessness in people's lives. Such an open door for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That's where these guys are. It's not drug-induced, their hopelessness, but it has the same effect. They felt like they cast their whole lives - you would say today, "They planned their whole lives out, and now with the death of Jesus," and they kind of ascribe to the women at the tomb, "Oh, they just saw a vision, and it wasn't really real." Because he said, "Now it's the third day." They're giving the story. "It's the third day." And what they mean is, "It's the third day, and Jesus isn't alive." You have to laugh at verse 19. "Haven't you guys heard these things?" And Jesus said, "What things? Tell Me about the things" (that I supposedly haven't heard about). He's just so gracious to meet us where we are, but He won't force His way into your life. He's going to come alongside of you. He's going to ask you the questions that would draw out from you faith. And as these guys are on the end of their journey, and they're kicking cans, and it's more than just sad - they are hopeless! They don't know what's next, so they're going home. They don't know what's next. They're just going to go home. Jesus meets them as a Gentleman, and He doesn't force His way into their lives. He doesn't force His way into your life.

Tying this all together, as Jesus comes alongside these guys - He comes alongside of them so much that, later on (you can read the rest of Luke 24) they beg Him to stay. They went from hopeless to, "You can't leave us! You can't leave us. You've got to stay with us." That's how faithful our Lord is. He can turn things around so quickly and so wonderfully. But I have to say this before we end. If you want to stay in your self-imposed storm, you can. If you want to stay in your self-imposed storm, you can. If you want to stay in the lifestyle you've chosen, you can. If you want to reap the consequences of your own sin and not be forgiven of them, you

can. Let me just share a little bit in my life. I am a very blessed man in more than one way - multiple ways. And I mean blessed in the most, deepest sense. God loves me. He cares for me. He rescued me, delivered me, sustains me. I can go on and on. But this last Christmas was the hardest Christmas since my son passed away - for me personally. I mean, I was right at the edge. You get into these deep times - at least I do. I'll just give you a little bit of insight. Just between you and me. Don't tell anybody. It's just between you and me. You can laugh. It's all right. I was in a deep, deep depression - discouragement - whatever you want to call it, it doesn't matter. Dark and difficult. And I don't quite know why. It's probably a little bit of me. It's hard to tell somebody when they're depressed that there's a selfishness attached to it. And I know that, personally. There's a selfishness. You become very self-centered, and you only talk about yourself. You isolate yourself. The Bible says it's not wise. And then the only voice you listen to is your own, and you're not giving yourself good counsel. You're self-talk is not good. And it was just hard in one sense, for me personally. And we have a class in our church - it's called "Grief Share." And we have it in our church because a man, an elder in our fellowship, was on vacation many years ago and suffered a tragic accident and lost his wife on his vacation - on his anniversary - and came back home with this "Grief Share" ministry, and it's been going strong ever since. And so we have a thing on holidays, and it's called "Surviving the Holidays." It's a one-class, one-time thing. It's a couple hours on a Sunday afternoon. And I was coming to church just like any other time, and I saw the announcement for it, and I remember thinking, "You know what, Lord? You have to give me permission to go." I felt like the Lord wanted me to go, and so I didn't argue with Him. "Okay, I think that would be good for me." But I said, "You've got to give me permission to go and not be Pastor Ed." And what that meant is that, "I'm just going to go in there as Ed Taylor, the man that follows God, and that anyone else in there is going to be cared for by somebody else." Which is kind of a hard thing for a pastor to do. And I wasn't sure what the Lord was going to answer me. I wasn't sure. But I got the sense that He gave me permission. "Just go ahead and go." And I did. And it was a couple weeks ahead, and I did, and I sat through it, and I just basically cried the whole time. I just couldn't deal with everything, everything that was going. I was watching the video, but, man, the Lord gave me a word through that video. And the word was this - you have to make a decision to take the next step. And the Lord spoke to me and said, "You know what, Ed? You've been here a long time. You've been dealing with this for a few years and all the drama and trials around it." And He was ministering to me. He said, "You've made a lot of decisions. It's time to make another decision." And He just released me. I'm like, "Lord, I can make

another decision. I decided to come here, I decided to listen, I decided to open up, I decided to talk about it, Lord. With Your strength, I can make another decision." And I believe God is telling you - in His strength, you can make another decision. You, too. You can make another decision. It may not be grief. I know it's hard to talk about grief at a time like this. But that's a reality for many of us. It's the reality of life. But we have the hope of the resurrection - Jesus Christ. He lived, He died, and He rose again. And those that died in Christ before us are in the presence of the Lord right now. They're not asking to come back. They're anticipating our reuniting with them. And it's good news in that sense. But the Bible says we don't mourn like those who have no hope, but we mourn like those that do have hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). But if you want to stay in the self-imposed storm of your life, you can stay there. And yet Jesus is coming alongside of you to open up your heart, to speak to you. And you might even have to have that prayer time like David does so many times. "God, You just don't understand what's going on! I can't believe what's happening!" And the Lord says, "Well tell Me. What's happening?" And you begin to share, and you begin to talk, and the Holy Spirit begins to minister to you. And in the strength of Jesus Christ, you can make the next decision. And He will establish you, and you'll take the next step. I like what Elisabeth Elliot says. She says she had to learn (after Jim Elliot died), in those early days of widowhood, to do the next thing. Do the next thing. And that's the life of the believer, man. Do the next thing. Take the next step. Make the next phone call. Send a text message. Man, if you guys really want to mess with Pastor Jack, send him 5,000 emails! (Laughing) Just overload him. Those of you that did write him a note, you know how good it felt to encourage your Pastor. Even if you're in the midst of craziness right now, you took five minutes to encourage your Pastor, and the Holy Spirit said, "Yes!"

Hey, there's a lost and dying world around us, and as we are able to walk with the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we're able to reveal to people there's a heaven and a hell, and Jesus Christ has come to deliver you from yourself. There's nothing you can do on your own. You need to call upon God and ask Him to forgive you of your sins, and He'll meet you right where you are. The Bible says it shall come to pass that "whoever calls upon the name of the LORD shall be saved" (Romans 10:13). That's a salvation statement, but it's also a practical statement. When you call upon the name of the LORD, He's there to rescue you. He's there to minister to you. He's there to strengthen and establish you. Amen?

So, God, we recognize the simple things. Sometimes we forget the simple things, the reality of the things that we go through in our lives and the craziness of life and the reality of storms and difficulties. And it doesn't matter, really, what we're going through, Lord. It's painful and hard for each of us. There's no greater thing among us today, God. We're going through the storms that You allow, that You might have even sent our way. But You still love us, and You still care for us. God, You told us in Your Bible that even if we are faithless, You remain faithful. I just pray, God, and I didn't anticipate to go in the direction I did with my boy, but I think that there're many that heard the words to take the next step, to make another decision, to decide. And I pray that You would empower them with the work of Your Holy Spirit to do what they need to do in order to get out of this deep, dark difficulty - just take the next step, do the next thing, Lord. And so we are going to be careful, God, to give You all the praise and the glory for all the great things You have done, for Your great love for us, Your care and concern for our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

If you've never given your life to Jesus, you've never repented of your sins, you've never surrendered your life to the One who died for you, it doesn't have to be anything fancy. You don't have to walk an aisle, although that's fine. You don't have to raise a hand. That's fine. All you need to do is call out to Him. Jesus put it this way. "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus," Paul actually wrote this (Romans 10:9), "and you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." And maybe the biggest decision you need to make today is to admit that you need to be saved, that your life is not connected to the God who created you, and that the reality of that gap between you and God has been covered by Jesus Christ Himself. So I invite you to do just that. I'm certain ..... are we going to have ushers or prayer folks up here? Is that how it works? We've got a prayer team? This brother is going to personally lead every one of you to Christ tonight. (Laughing) What's your name? (Pastor Rod) Dude, you've led so many people to the Lord already, Rod. And I bet you have. Let's stand together. We're going to sing this song. Aren't these young people amazing? (Clapping) They're amazing! They're amazing! God is doing a work in them. Thank you. Thanks for the privilege of serving you. I know it's no small thing to be in the pulpit, man. It's unbelievable. So thanks for allowing me to be a part of your fellowship and worship with you tonight. (Clapping)

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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