

A Great Storm

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[0 : 00] I'd like to welcome you to this, in many ways, kind of surreal form of worship. But nevertheless, I'd like to welcome you to it.

And I have to confess that I feel somewhat like a rusty engine in need of much lubrication because I haven't preached since the middle of March.

I have not been engaged in any services. Until today. I'd like to begin our service by reading, first of all, from Psalm 118, and the Singed Psalms version, from verse 1 to 9.

Of course, we can't sing. Oh, thank the Lord, for he is good. His steadfast love endures always. Now let the house of Israel say, His love will last through endless days.

And let the house of Aaron say, His love forever will endure. Let those who fear the Lord declare, His love will stand forever sure.

[1 : 16] I cried in anguish to the Lord. He answered me and set me free. The Lord is with me. I'll not fear.

What harm can people do to me? The Lord is with me constantly. He is the one who gives me aid. I'll look in triumph on my foes.

I will not need to be afraid. It's better far to trust the Lord than look for help to man's defense. Better far to trust the Lord than in a prince of confidence.

Let us now engage in prayer. Let us pray. Eternal God, we are exhorted to praise Thy name.

And it grieves us that we cannot sing out the praises of the Lord when we gather corporately in this way.

[2 : 29] For we believe that singing out the praise of God is such a fundamental, integral part of the worship of the Almighty.

And when we cannot raise our voices today in loud acclaim and praise and join with the holy choir that is around the throne.

It is cause for grief in our hearts. And so, Lord, we pray today for the unction of the Holy Spirit that we may indeed have praise in our hearts.

for it is through the illumination and enlightenment and teaching of Thy Holy Spirit that sinners such as we can come to give praise to the Lord Almighty even in the secrecy of our heart when we cannot audibly give praise by singing out aloud.

O grant, most gracious God that Thou wouldst indeed anoint us from on high with that unction that comes from above so that as we gather in Thy name in this place today in ways that we never foresaw throughout our lives O grant, most gracious God that we come with a measure of a sense of indebtedness and thankfulness in our hearts for Thy continuing goodness to us and we pray, O Lord for an outpouring from on high that would indeed bring men and women and boys and girls in our homes and in our communities to gather to praise Thy name to extol the virtues of God Almighty and to acknowledge our continued indebtedness unto Thee bless the congregation at this time in their history and development grant, O Lord that Thou wouldst continue to guide them and lead them to one of Thy choosing who would pastor the flock here to would indeed be a true under-shepherd under Thine hand in leading Thy sheep and the lambs of the flock leading them to Thyself and in being used of Thee to bring others into the kingdom of the Son of Thy love that they too might experience the full-armed liberty that is granted by the one who breaks the bars asunder that prevents souls from coming to worship

[5 : 52] Thy great and holy name O Lord God we pray that Thou wouldst bless the many who may desire to be here today and cannot who are in the solitude of their own homes the many who are confined to virtual worship a term that was so alien to so many but who now are thankful that they can at least hear the message proclaimed through the means of technology that are afforded to us we give Thee thanks for all of these means that are used for the spread of the gospel message but we long for the day when Thy people can gather again and congregate together incorporate worship of Thy great and glorious name we pray O Lord for those who have suffered in so many ways over these past months those who are grieving the loss of loved ones we commit to Thy care and keeping we give Thee thanks for the commitment of those in the NHS and for the ways in which they have met the demands that have been placed upon them the onerous demands that have led many to be in the front line

O Lord give wisdom and guidance to those in government and those who reign and rule over us as a nation and nations grant that Thou would lead them to Thyself in days when we feel so often that we are like a rudderless ship on the sea of life with no sense of direction O Lord come we pray Thee come in grace and mercy come in power again and lead souls to Thyself help us as we turn to Thy truth lead us and guide us we pray Thee cleanse in the blood in Jesus name we ask it with forgiveness of sin Amen Let us now read from the Old Testament scriptures from the book of Psalms

Psalms 107 All give thanks to the Lord for He is good for His steadfast love endures forever let the redeemed of the Lord say so whom He has redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands from the east and from the west and from the north and from the south some wandered in desert wastes finding no way to a city to dwell in hungry and thirsty their soul fainted within them then they cried to the Lord in their trouble and He delivered them from their distress He led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in let them thank the Lord for His steadfast love for His wondrous works to the children of men for He satisfies the longing soul and the hungry soul

He fills with good things some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death prisoners in affliction and in irons for they had rebelled against the words of God and spurned the counsel of the Most High so He bowed their hearts down with hard labor they fell down with none to help then they cried to the Lord in their trouble and He delivered them from their distress He brought them out of darkness and from the shadow of death and burst their bonds apart let them thank the Lord for His steadfast love for His wondrous works to the children of men for He shatters the doors of bronze and cuts into the bars of iron some were fools through their sinful ways and because of their iniquities suffered affliction they loathed any kind of food and they drew near to the gates of death then they cried to the

Lord in their trouble and He delivered them from their distress He sent out His word and healed them and delivered them from their destruction let them thank the Lord for His steadfast love for His wondrous works to the children of men and let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving tell of His deeds and songs of joy some went down to the sea and ships doing business on the great waters they saw the deeds of the Lord His wondrous works in the deep for He commanded and raised the stormy wind which lifted up the waves of the sea they mounted up to heaven they went down to the depths their courage melted away in their evil plight they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits end then they cried to the Lord in their trouble

[12 : 14] He delivered them from their distress He made the storm be still and the waves of the sea were hushed then where they were glad that the waters were quiet and He brought them to their desired haven let them thank the Lord for His steadfast love for His wondrous works to the children of men let them extol them in the congregation of the people and praise them in the assembly of the elders Amen and may God bless to us that reading from His truth let us now turn again to that passage and read verse 23 some went down to the sea and ships doing business on the great waters they saw the deeds of the

Lord His wondrous works in the deep in this psalm the psalmist exhorts members of the community to give thanks to the Lord and the primary reason that he highlights to give thanks to the Lord is that God is good that is an unchanging factor it is always true of God God is good and the evidence that the psalmist gives us that God is good is the enduring steadfast love of God or the enduring covenantal love of God let us read the opening verse of the psalm again oh give thanks to the

Lord for he is good for his steadfast love endures forever but then you note there is a particular group addressed and they are called upon to give thanks to the Lord this group that are especially addressed are called the redeemed of the Lord let the redeemed of the Lord say so whom he has redeemed from trouble and gathered in the redeemed of the Lord it has a particular ring to it doesn't it the redeemed of the Lord in other places they are spoken of as the ransomed of the Lord those who have been brought who have been bought back by their kinsman redeemer just as

Boaz in the book of Ruth in the book of Romans in the book of Ruth purchased Ruth so the Boaz of the New Testament the Lord Jesus Christ has bought back those who are designated the redeemed what is more his own death was the purchase price and whatever the causes of sorrow in their lives they are spoken of by the prophet Isaiah as returning to Zion with singing it is a time of great rejoicing for their sorrows are no more there are many who have already passed into glory shorter catechism reminds us the souls of believers that death do immediately pass into glory a number of them perhaps you walked with them until the time for parting came and perhaps in your inner thought process you go there but your vision is so dim and your understanding is still largely in darkness even although in your thought process you try to visualize those who were with you and formed such an integral part of the fellowship and who have passed from here to there they have been delivered from trouble and gathered in well the redeemed surely have much cause to praise the

Lord for his goodness and for their personal experience of his steadfast covenantal love towards them the redeemed of the Lord what a blessed group can you find yourself among them today you know Paul in his letter to the Romans in the first chapter tells us that one mark of the unregenerate is that they neither glorify God as God nor give thanks to him so which group are you in today those who are glorifying God as God and giving thanks to him or those who are the redeemed of the

[18 : 57] Lord and express their indebtedness to the Most High for his glorious mercy his abounding grace his infinite goodness his covenantal steadfast love towards you the psalmist in developing his theme of faithful covenant love and redemption sets before us four poetic pictures and each is a poetic picture of a providence which causes great deep harrowing distress in the lives of those groups of people who are ultimately persuaded to turn to God in prayer and they experience miraculous divine deliverance from their trying providences they appear to be four different groups some would suggest that they all speak of the people of

Judah the first group that are mentioned are those who are homeless or wanderers lost in the desert many of you if not all have seen homeless people on the streets of our cities it is a sight that causes acute distress to see people lying on the streets with their few possessions whatever the reason for their being homeless and destitute and note how the psalmist highlights the situation here some wandered in desert wastes finding no way to a city to dwell in hungry and thirsty their soul fainted within them destitute homeless suffering from pangs of hunger and thirst and I think you can read into it how they were hounded from place to place

I cannot speak from personal experience of being homeless in days of lockdown I'm most grateful that I had a home where I could live without experiencing pangs of hunger or thirst but you know it's not a literal experience of homelessness or deprivation that is the focus of the thrust of the psalmist in this picture but that which describes the spiritual state of every person by nature by nature we are homeless destitute hounded by the holy law of God wandering from place to place and I suppose one of the best illustrations of this in the Bible is found in the New Testament in the story of the younger son you remember how he left the place of plenty he had funds the world was a most attractive alluring place but because of his reckless lifestyle he was reduced to penury the

Bible states the younger son gathered all he had took a journey into a far country there he squandered his property and reckless living and when he had spent everything a severe famine arose in that country and he began to be in need he became a destitute impoverished person he would have staved off hunger with a pig's will that was the level of his destitution and that is a picture of man in the misery of sin we try in our unenlightened state to feed our hunger and thirst with what can never satisfy and leaves us with a craving that nothing in this world can ever satiate the younger son never saw himself like that until as the

Bible reminds us he came to himself only then did the attraction of the father's house begin to act as a magnet to this destitute homeless impoverished reduced to such a level of destitution man away from the father's cave was misery but oh what love he enjoyed in the embrace of the father's house there was deliverance in his experience and perhaps the Lord made you also aware of your lostness till you prayed to the almighty and you came to experience the wondrous power of his marvelous grace the second picture is of people in prison I've never seen at least until the present moment the inside of a prison for which

[24 : 35] I'm profoundly grateful the closest I've ever come to ever been in a prison is to tour a prison in Dublin known as Kilmainham jail it's preserved today as a tourist attraction and facility where many were incarcerated not so much for being law breakers but more political prisoners when Ireland was striving for home rule and I can assure you in that jail the accommodation leaves a lot to be desired in my time I have corresponded with a prisoner several times and spoken to some who have had the experience of being placed in a cell and the psalmist here gives us a picture some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death prisoners in affliction and denierance you remember in the

New Testament Peter was imprisoned in chains condemned to die again in the New Testament we know how Paul and Silas were beaten and locked with their feet placed in the stocks and very often the situation described literally was one that bred hopelessness Charles Colson remember he was involved in Watergate scandal he speaks of his time in prison of smelling the despair that permeated the air of the prison but again I have to say that the psalmist is not speaking so much of a literal place but a spiritual place that's what lies at the heart of these words it's a picture of man in sin shackled in the prison cell of unbelief the bars of the cell are strong they're unyielding they're resistant to all pressure there is no hope of escape by tunneling out or some other ingenious kind of method the cells are escape proof only one has the power to release from such a penal institution the one who came in the words of the prophet to proclaim freedom for the prisoners

Jesus Christ he bursts their bonds says the psalmist he shatters the doors of bronze and cut in two the bars of iron the picture is of a liberator possessed of mighty power that releases forever the incarcerated souls from their dark cell Isaiah speaks of him as marching in the greatness of his strength it is I speaking in righteousness and you note no name is mentioned no name is needed the authoritative declaration is sufficient to identify the speaker has been no less than Yahweh God himself mighty to save emphasizing that there is no restriction on his ability to do so can you testify today that that power has been at work in your life and that you have been liberated by him and the third picture is of people in hospital or people who are sick the psalmist speaks of illness that brings to the very verge of death they lost any they loathed any kind of food they drew near to the gates of death no the psalmist wasn't looking down through the ages to the present and describing those who have suffered from severe covid symptoms although he could anyone who has had experience of grave illness will know how food becomes so unappealing the last thing that you want is food the very sight of food is nauseating when you're ill but not again this illness is not so much a description of a disease of some kind that afflicts man but an illness brought on by the power of indwelling sin some were fools through their sinful ways and because of their iniquities suffered affliction and so you note the healing that is effected it's not done through the advance in medicine or the skill and dedication and commitment of doctors and nurses great as that undoubtedly is it is through the ministry of one who supplies the power of the truth as the great physician he sent out his word and healed them in other words they experienced wonderful resurrecting power through the ministry of the truth being applied by the power of the Holy

Spirit they were reborn as Peter writes in the first letter since you have been born again not of perishable seed but of imperishable through the living and abiding word of God and that brings me to the picture on which I wish to focus just a little people in a storm most commentators consider that this picture is the most beautiful most poetic and certainly the most stirring section of the psalm I leave that to yourselves to decide but it is certainly a most graphic account of the dangers that beset those who are on the ocean waves in storm conditions notice first the place of the storm it is in deep waters they saw the deeds of the

Lord his wondrous works in the deep now let me say I have never been in more stormy waters than the minch and that was sufficient there have been one or two occasions when I was glad to step ashore find my feet on unmoving terra firma an old experienced fisherman he's in his 90s today told me of one particular minch crossing from the mainland to Stornoway he was never so glad to see the harbor lights of Stornoway such was the violence of the storm that they encountered in crossing the minch now that was someone who was used to be on the waves but the psalmist pictures for us a storm in the vast turbulent deep oceans of the world which must be an altogether terrifying experience even for the most adventurous and experienced seamen an illustration of a great storm and the life of

[32 : 33] John Newton was instrumental under God in bringing the former slave driver to Christ he expected every time that the ship descended into the trough of the wave that it would not rise again as he and others struggled to keep pumping the water that threatened to swamp them and he writes the 21st day of March 1748 remained indelibly etched on his mind so that he writes he never let the date pass unnoticed on that day he says the Lord sent from on high and delivered me out of deep waters and as we saw in the other three pictures the imagery of a stormy sea is not to be understood in the literal sense but the spiritual we know from other places in the psalms that the psalmist found himself in the depths he speaks of a soul been cast down been cast within him and he relates his experience in this way all your breakers and your waves have gone over me as if he were submerged by massive seas such is his assessment of where he was placed in the deep again we find him crying out save me oh god for the waters have come up to my neck

I sink in deep mire where there is no foothold I have come into deep waters and the flood sweeps over me I have come into deep waters and the description that he depicts for us is of a drowning man or one stuck in the mire at the very end of his endurance at the end of his rope no these words in psalm 69 are applied in the highest sense to the messiah they're messianic they're applied to christ himself he is the one who went down into deep waters he goes down into the seas of divine wrath where no human eye could follow him down into the depths until he emerged victorious and triumphant as one who conquered death and the grave and has risen to the right hand above death we have seen the depths that have been brought about by the effect of the coronavirus people cut off from loved ones in what became their final illness surrounded by strangers as they struggled with the virus that was squeezing out their very life life the many perplexing questions that arose in many homes and families on account of affliction in this way these depths may or may not be spiritually orientated but what about the depths occasioned by your assessment of your spiritual status as you look in to the recesses of your own heart are you saying with the prodigal father I have sinned against heaven and before you

I am no I am no longer worthy to be called your son does that thought arise when you conduct an assessment of your own inner life do you feel that you do not bear the marks of those who are the sons of the living God or the children of the living God is that the assessment that you make when you look within causing you to come into deep waters feeling unable to pray unable to open the Bible and concentrate on the word of God unable to read the word of God without losing your concentration causing you to be burdened and cast down in the depths unable to think straight feeling as of

God is not hearing your petitions well the psalmist speaks about that kind of experience when he's in the depths and if you felt yourself in that situation in the past or are in it today you're not alone thousands of years ago under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the psalmist wrote down precisely that kind of personal account of his own experience as one of us who's in the depths and begging God to hear in deep waters that's the place of the storm it suggests to me a picture of fearful isolation much worse than the isolation that people may have experienced during lockdown in the middle of a vast ocean with no source of help or safety you know some can testify to experience in a sense of dreadful isolation who've been cut off from family and friends during time of lockdown but what about in the spiritual realm feeling cut off from the fellowship of the people of

God and cut off from God himself that's a storm when you're in the depths and you notice the second thing about the storm who produces the storm it is God says the psalmist he commanded and raised the stormy wind which lifted up the waves of the sea in other words the psalmist is drawing attention to the action of a sovereign God the Lord reigns the Lord sits enthroned as king forever he says in other places the trials are ordered by him remember how that is so well illustrated in the life of Abraham after these things the Bible tells us God tested Abraham and said to him Abraham and he said here I am he said take your son your only son

[39 : 54] Isaac whom you love go to the land of Moriah offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mounts which I shall tell you can you imagine the silent unexpressed thoughts of this man of God during these three days as he traveled to Mount Moriah God wants me to offer the son of promise the son through whom he will bless many nations what a trial what a storm and what is it that shines through the storm is it not the obedience of faith in the life of Abraham remember when the angel of the Lord called him from heaven and said Abraham Abraham remember the response of Abraham and he said here I am where was Abraham ah was he not in the very place where God asked him to be engaged in the very act which

God had called him to in the offering of his son he was in the place of obedience is that where you and I are reckoning with the storms of life are we in the place of obedience and then there is the place in the deep there is the person who produces the storm and then we have the picture of the storm and the psalmist tells us here they're at their wit's end they mounted up to heaven they went down to the depths their courage melted away they were at their wit's end you see they had placed their confidence and their hopes in their own powers and they find themselves helpless they've lost their sense of direction it's a picture of great danger their courage melted away in their evil plight in their peril their courage melted away fear in the face of such grave danger perhaps once carefree perhaps once bold fearless but now in the reality of peril their courage melts away the frailty and the fragility of their courage it melts away there is also the image of total lack of control and breakdown of rational ability even even crossing the mention on a stormy day your limbs seem to have a mind of their own don't they as you stagger this way and that if you try to move from your seat to the cafeteria area at a glance you can tell the seafarer from the non seafarer they have no difficulty in walking well in this picture they were at the mercy of the storm humanly speaking they were lifted up by the waves that it felt as if they were suspended in mid-air they mounted up to heaven and then down into the trough of the wave as if they would never rise again they went down to the depths they were like a twig in a whimper they are helpless and so the impression is created they are at their wit's hand human wisdom completely useless in this situation it's a picture of man doing his all but now exhausted and the storm rages still well we could say that of the current virus that has afflicted the world it is still there despite the ingenuity and wisdom of man and the picture here is that in the face faced with death by drowning in the middle of a vast heaving stormy ocean of life they are at their wit's end i once read a poem was designated wit's end corner this is how it went christian with troubled brow are you are you thinking of what is before you and all you are bearing now does all the world seem against you and you in the battle alone remember at wood's end corner is just where god's power is shown are you standing at wood's end corner blinded with wearing pain feeling you cannot endure it you cannot bear the

strain bruised through the constant suffering dizzy and dazed and dumb remember at wood's end corner is where jesus loves to come are you standing at wood's end corner you work before you spread all line begun and finished and pressing on heart and head longing for strength to do it stretching out trembling hands remember at wood's end corner the burden bearer stuns are you standing at wood's end corner then you just in the very spot to learn the wondrous resources of him who faileth not no doubt to a brighter pathway your footsteps will soon be moved but only at wood's end corner is the God who is able proved and you know it very often takes a storm to see

God in your life the God who lets you get frightened enough to need him and then comes close to you for you to see him do you remember the disciples in the storm and the God man coming striding majestically over the waves so if he was on a calm level here and they saw God coming near it is I be not afraid and you know when that happens you'll never be the same again perhaps today the enemy of your soul is seen in the peril of the storm continue where is your

God is not where you are or have you seen him in the storm and then you notice there's something else there's prayer they cried to the Lord in their trouble you see adversity in the life of the believer awakens prayer that's a feature in all of the pictures in the psalm verse 6 they cried to the Lord in their trouble verse 13 they cried to the Lord in their trouble verse 19 they cried to the Lord in their trouble and then here in this passage verse 28 they cried to the Lord in their trouble they were seeking to escape from the desert from prison from illness from the storm and there is no escape there can be no escape without going to God their own resources are futile in these situations they have discovered the feebleness and the inadequacy of their own resources there is an urgency a passion in their crying as they turn to the living

[48 : 20] God oh is that urgency in your own life today cried to the living God faced with your own helplessness and powerlessness and the futility of your own resources in the face of all the aggravations that are caused by the current crisis do you feel compelled to cry out to the living God to persist and cry out to the living God you know prayer is not something that comes naturally it's not it's not something that is easy because there will be so many distractions placed in your path you have to persevere you know before I left the house my wife said don't keep them long and here I am and we're almost an hour into the service find there's peace in the storm he made the storm be still and the waves of the sea were hushed you know the impression is created in my mind at least that the calm was created in the blink of an eye they go from turbulence to calm from panic to peace the sea is still the winds are hushed peace in the storm sounds a paradox perhaps you've met people and their providence is extremely difficult and you've been amazed at their serenity because you know that they are looking to the living

God and that their trust is in the Savior Jesus Christ you try to place yourself in their position and face their peculiar trials with such serenity and you cannot it's because they have peace with God and they are enjoying the peace of God and then you have the purpose of the storm he guides them to a haven and you know I'm going to suggest that it's only those who have been in a storm who can appreciate the words of the psalmist here then were they glad that the waters were quiet and he brought them to the desired haven he brought them to the place that they needed after the trauma of the storm oh have you not felt that if you're in

Christ you've come through trial and Christ has brought you into the warmth of his loving embrace and you've rested in him you've been flooded with a sense of his peace think how much more so when he brings you if you are in Christ today to the ultimate destination to the safety and the security of the haven from which you need never sail again forever with the Lord then were they glad that the waters were quiet brought to the sanctuary of eternal bliss the place of the storm deep waters the person who brought the storm

God himself the picture of the storm tossed up and down prayer the purpose of the storm bringing them to the heaven and finally there is praise you know you read the history of the people of Israel and one glaring factor stands out and it is this how often they forgot to give thanks to God for his marvelous deliverance in their lives here the psalmist says let them thank the Lord it's almost as if he's afraid that they're going to forget the deliverance that has been executed on their behalf by

God let them praise the Lord for his steadfast love for his wondrous words to the children you know there is nothing so becoming the children of God as public acknowledgement of his unmerited favors and his unfathomable goodness to men have we not today great cause to thank him for his faithful covenant love for his wonders can we say with a psalm I will sing to the Lord as long as I live I will sing praises to my God will I be may my meditation be pleasing to him for I rejoice in the Lord bless the Lord oh my soul praise the Lord how can you do that by offering yourself to him by offering yourself to him may

[55 : 17] God bless to us these thoughts on his own truth I know