

A Tale of Two Storms

On December 30, 1994 the *Washington Post* reported an amazing story about an orphanage director's experience during the tsunami that devastated Sri Lanka along with 11 other countries at a cost of over 77,000 lives. On Sunday morning, December 29 the founder and director of the Samaritan Children's Home, Dayalan Sanders, was relaxing on his bed thinking over the sermon he was planning to deliver in the next half hour in the seaside chapel located 200 yards from the beach in the small fishing village of Navalady. Suddenly his wife burst into the room frantically urging him to come outside to look at the sea.

He tried to calm her saying, "God is with us. Nothing will ever harm us without His permission." He then ran outside to see on the horizon what he described as a "30-foot wall of water," racing toward their seaside orphanage. He immediately yelled out for everyone to gather the children and get down to the dock and onto the boat. Their small boat was docked in the lagoon on the other side of the narrow peninsula where orphanage was situated. Fortunately amidst all the holiday preparations and events of the preceding two days, Sanders had forgotten to detach and store the boat's motor as he usually did each night. After a lot of commotion every one of the 28 kids and support staff were accounted for and in the boat. With a beyond capacity boatload Sanders went to start up the typically temperamental engine. To his surprise the motor started with only one pull—something he attests had never happened before. "Usually you have to pull it four or five times," he said.

As they pulled away from the dock they looked back to see the massive wall of water overwhelm the orphanage and submerge it to the height of the roof's rafters. "It was a thunderous roar, and black sea," said Sanders. They continued to watch in amazement as the raging current continued its devastation on surrounding property. Even though their boat was safely on its way, their ordeal wasn't over.

The wall of water had not only made its way to the orphanage but was now cascading down onto the lagoon and the dock from which they had left. It was now heading toward the lagoon and their boat. At the same time the impact of the wave further up the shoreline was flooding the estuary leading into the lagoon that Sanders and the orphans were trying to get across. Caught between two currents the fear was that this convergence of water

would swamp their small and overloaded boat. Sanders reported that it was then he recalled the words written in the Book of Isaiah, “*When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall raise up a standard against it.*” With that in mind, Sanders raised his hand in the direction of the torrent and shouted, “I command you, in the name of Jesus—stop!”

Sanders then reported that the water seemed to “stall momentarily.” “I thought I was imagining things,” he said. The water began to roll back out to sea and the torrent subsided. As the sea flattened out they began to see a number of people in the water who were calling out for help—other villagers who had been swept off the peninsula. People were crying out, “Help us, help us,” Sanders and his wife were able to rescue one man. But they had to leave the rest behind because there wasn’t any more room in the boat.

While the orphanage was completely devastated, the staff and children escaped with their lives. While surveying the wreckage, Sanders broke down and cried, “Twenty years of my life put in here, and I saw it all disappear in 20 seconds.” Yet with gratitude, amazement, and relief he expressed, “If there was anyone who should have got swept away by this tidal wave, it should have been us.” “We were eyeball to eyeball with the wave,” he said.

“We’re Gonna Die!”

My buddy George and I had a similar experience a number of years ago when leading a rock-climbing outing with about 30 high school students. However, the storm on this occasion was lightning. After setting up a series of safety ropes to guide the students to the top of an exposed granite precipice, we gathered them at the top in preparation for an exciting free-rappel down the face. Adding to the excitement was the approaching storm and the noticeable decrease in the amount of time between thunder and lightning. It didn’t help that we were on the highest and most exposed point in the immediate area. And it wasn’t a good sign when everyone’s hair began to stand on end and the metal climbing gear gave off an eerie hum. In storm-speak this ionization process was preparing its next strike target. As the storm characteristically continued in one direction *toward us*, I called up to George to pray and address the storm like Jesus did. In the meantime I was down below in position to monitor the belay and to help students safely unclip and walk off the narrow ledge to safety. I also began to pray and to address the storm directly. Both of us understood the position we were in. We knew it would take about an hour to lower the students to safety no

matter which way we chose to lead them down. We also knew we were responsible for the safety of these young people.

George's first order of business was to get people to calm down. Some were excited and thought it was "cool" when their hair stood on end. Others were frightened and increasingly so as they became aware of the danger. One mother who came along was getting hysterical and screamed out, "we're gonna die!" Before George prayed and addressed the storm he calmed the mother with an authoritative, "shut-up!" This seemed to work. It certainly got everyone's attention. Like Jesus and the orphanage director, George stretched out his hand toward the approaching storm and audibly commanded it to "be still" and driven out in the opposite direction.

The students were praying too. So was I. Down below I too stretched out my hand and spoke to the storm in Jesus' name. Nothing seemed to change. It was a long five to ten minutes before the time between thunder and lightning increased and the storm appeared to be moving *away* from us. The storm by all appearances returned in the opposite direction from which it came. Soon afterward the clouds broke up and we were back to a sunny Sierra afternoon with everyone safely on the ground. Praise God!

These are amazing stories! Testimonies of God's power encourage and build our faith. That's why they're important to tell. Like me, God's people love stories and testimonies of God's presence and work in our world today. As a speaker I know people like to hear stories, and the more the better. To my surprise however I've observed that relatively few glean any practical significance from them.

Use It or Lose?

When I hear these stories, one of the questions that comes to mind for me is, **do we have something to lose if we fail to use the authority Christ has given us?** For example, would the tsunami have overtaken the boat and the orphans had the director not addressed it as he did? If Jesus had not addressed the storm on the Sea of Galilee as He did would he and his disciples have found themselves hanging on to debris in hopes of being rescued (Mk. 4)? Could some have drowned? And what could be the outcome of not using Christ's authority to speak to the various types of storms or mountains we face in the course living out our lives?

For example, would it make a difference when a job or means of income intended to be God's provision for you and part of funding His Kingdom always seems to go to someone else for no apparent reason? Can it make a difference when a number of circumstances clearly indicate that God has put you in a position of influence and the fruit of that opportunity is evident in the lives effected for Christ, only then to have it taken away due to health, an injury, or for some other reason? When your habits, hurts, and hang-ups keep you from fulfilling God's purpose and living in the freedom Christ has secured and willed for you. Will "speaking to the storm" provide the calm waters that will allow you to get to the other side where freedom is realized.

Whether it's a series of unfortunate circumstances, a loss of one kind or another, or responding to the reality of a loved one who's fallen away from the Lord or another who's dealing with a terminal illness, many of these instances are simply accepted and endured rather than challenged and fought against with the power of God.

Please understand that I realize things are more complicated than this and that not everything is "spiritual. Indeed, most of our problems are the result of choices we make outside the will of God or the result of simply living in a fallen world. After all, cars breakdown, people get sick or die, while others, even believers, get addicted. We get old, hurt, and discover that not everyday or all of our experiences are positive. However, when people don't even consider that what they are experiencing may not be from God, or the possibility a demonic influence could be *part* of the problem and is never tested, it's no wonder they and others continue to suffer.

Try talking an addict into the experience of freedom. Quote the scriptures and engage them in weekly, or daily Bible study if you want. Have them pray more often. Offer them a place to stay, food to eat, and unconditional love. Play Christian or worship music and attend church on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and twice on Sunday. While you're at it encourage them to join an NA, AA, CR group or enter rehab somewhere. While these may be helpful they will do little toward resolving a supernatural influence that keeps them in bondage IF one is contributing to the problem.

If we're honest most would have to admit that we end up essentially *managing* our sin, habits, hurts, and hang ups. By contrast, the scriptures reveal that Jesus didn't come to help us simply manage our problems but to live in the experiential freedom He provides through His resurrection

victory—the kind of freedom that empowers us to do what He says, live like He wants us to live, fulfill His purpose, and live life to the full as part of God’s family.

To Endure or Not Endure, That Is The Question

If some are managing, others are simply enduring. A well-known pastor of one of the largest churches in our area and I were having lunch one day. During our conversation his eldest son called and insisted on seeing his dad as soon as possible. The father let him know the approximate time our meeting would be over and said he would meet him then. The son responded by saying he would just come to the restaurant to meet him there. This turned out to be a “divine appointment” that God Himself arranged in regard to this young man. Had this particular meeting not happened in this way it is doubtful I would’ve ever had the privilege of ministering to him.

His father and I had discussed it many times prior to this meeting—how he hoped his son would be willing to receive ministry from us. I knew little of his story or all that his family had gone through on this incredibly long, painful, and confusing prodigal journey—one that had taken him from an obedient, gifted, called, anointed, intelligent, athletic son, husband and father to an injured, beaten, hospitalized, disabled, in constant pain and addicted to prescription drugs Bible School drop-out who was angry with God and the world. My problems were trivial by comparison. This guy is among only a handful of people I know with an incredible capacity to endure suffering without just giving up and cashing it in.

Being a PK in his case was not the typical curse it is for most pastors’ kids. As the eldest son, Jim was more like a prince-prodigy. Experientially he knew from an early age that God had called and gifted him for a life of ministry. As a “daddy’s boy” he was in training right from the beginning. Observant and astute he was savvy to how it all worked—church, ministry, preaching, pastoral care, leadership, missions etc. And he’d seen plenty. His father is an exceptional teacher and leader; his mother loving and wise. Together they saw a small downtown church transform into one of the largest congregations in the San Joaquin Valley. This was real growth too and not something that could be attributed to marketing, seeker-sensitive programming, or church growth strategies. There was a balanced, Christ and Word-centered move of God’s Spirit that produced a genuine love and joy within and through their congregation. This love and joy characterized

and was associated with this church for many years to follow. That love combined with God's power not only transformed people, it drew them.

As a youngster Jim not only observed all this, he experienced it. As a young adult he continued to pursue his calling and left home to attend Bible School for pastoral training. Shortly after this a series of unfortunate and devastating events took place that would change the course of his life. We later found out they were demonically inspired.

As his life gradually spiraled downward his anger toward God increased with each debilitating circumstance. With a statistically high suicide rate associated with the resulting medical condition he resigned himself to endure a life of excruciating pain for the sake of his wife and family. Anger turned to a destructive and cynical rage aimed at a God who clearly had made Himself known and a calling he was unable to deny even at his worst. Fueling the fires of rage were the occasional reminders that came through well-meaning people either affirming his "call" or offering a clear and prophetic "word from the Lord" to assure him of it.

Like a kid channeling the laser-like rays of the sun through a magnifying glass on a sidewalk ant, Jim regarded all this as further proof that God was simply cruel. On the one hand he knew God and the calling on his life was undeniable. On the other hand there was the confusion, frustration, hopelessness and anger at the seeming impossibility of realizing it--the proverbial carrot dangling elusively out of reach.

In the early weeks of meeting together for prayer, I always knew when Jim would arrive. I could hear the stereo thumping and screaming in garbage-truck-colliding tones that reverberated through my street-front office wall. This would take place each week for about 10 to 15 minutes or so before he got out of the car to come into the office. He later told me this was his way of calming things down inside his head. It strikes me as funny how I am so different in that way.

He would often tell me how difficult it was for him just to get to my office. His visits were preceded by an overwhelming sense of anxiety mixed with anger and doubts that anything would change, along with thoughts of wanting to quit. He also realized it was a tremendous spiritual battle. I asked him why he persisted. His reply, "I can't deny that every time I come here God shows up." It was true. On one of those occasions, he

emphatically stated that God had spoken to him clearly and unmistakably, “Jim, stop enduring and start contending!” It was a light-bulb moment that changed everything in his understanding of what was going on. For the first time he was convinced that his life and his calling was something that had to be fought for—that an “enemy did this.”

It was also the first time he believed it for himself. The idea that there was a spiritual battle over his life and the fulfillment of God’s purpose through him was something God communicated to him the very first time we met. In fact it was the catalyst for him to make that first call to come in to see me. At our first introduction he was profoundly struck by the question I asked him, “You believe your life is worth fighting for, don’t you?” He was stunned and intrigued. It got inside his head and wouldn’t leave him alone until he called, he later told me. At that time, I was the one who believed it. Now God was asking Jim to accept it and to do something about it. Up until this moment, he simply accepted everything that came his way—whatever the doctor’s said, each painful surgery, the grim prognosis of a painful and unrealized future.

Gradually Jim stepped up and became quite the warrior. Ironically Jim was a man with a black belt in martial arts but had no idea how to fight spiritually. With all diligence he prepared himself physically and yet found himself unable to defend himself against a spiritually motivated and blind-sided gang attack that left him fighting for his life. After six-months in the hospital and a difficult recovery he could no longer pursue a promising career as a lawyer. Mostly confined to his home and bed, Jim’s monthly disability check and his wife’s teaching income would have to be enough to live on.

Once Jim became aware of his enemy, “it was on.” Fighting *not* like a man beating the air, Jim began to affirm his calling and fight for everything God promised and willed for him. His knowledge of the Scriptures and God’s promises combined with a new found understanding and practice of using Christ’s authority was a double-edged weapon that didn’t simply protect him but enabled him to overcome the forces that kept him from realizing all that God had intended for him. Others joined the battle too. Indeed this was a “gang-fight” that engaged a number of brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ. Foremost of whom was his wife. That woman can pray; and with a vengeance.

Jim's story merits a more detailed version for one to truly appreciate the miraculous nature of God's deliverance and freedom. Unfortunately, I am unable to adequately convey his story in the space of this chapter. Besides, it's his story and I hope someday he will tell it. However I would like to report that Jim's health has incrementally improved. So much so that it is no longer a barrier to him fulfilling the purpose God intended for him. After serving on staff with us a couple of years he is now ministering as an associate pastor at a nearby church. For this we continue to rejoice and praise God.

The lesson here is that despite one's circumstances, feelings, or problems the starting point and foundation for victory and freedom is God's Word—what He wants, wills, and promises. In Jim's case, God's will and promise was for freedom to fulfill the purpose he was originally called to. The storm or barrier that needed to be addressed and resolved was the physical disability, the lies and bondage that resulted from them. The lightning storm we faced on top of the rock and the storm Jesus addressed on the sea were not only threats to life and limb but attempts to thwart God's larger purpose.

Jesus' command, "Let's go to the other side of the lake" was God's Word and the truth on which the disciples' faith was to be based. What Jesus said was God's will. And here the Word of God was to "go to the other side of the lake." So come hell, or high water in this case, God's will was to make it to the other side. This command was the True North by which they were to set their bearings, not their circumstances or feelings despite how convincing they can be. While Jesus was certainly tired enough to sleep through all this commotion, I believe there was a good deal of security in Him knowing the absolute nature of His Father's will--to get to the other side. It was on this basis He confidently addressed the storm subjecting it to God's purpose. And this is the same foundation on which we must *speak to* and subject those things that stand in the way of God's will for us.

This is the essence of Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom and the point of His prayer "thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Like the North Star it's the one constant by which we can keep our bearings during a storm. Had the disciples recognized Jesus' command as being equal with God's will they may have responded to the storm with less fear and more faith.

When God's will is for "*no one to perish, but everyone to come to repentance*" (2 Pet. 3:9); "*who wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth*" (1 Tim. 2:4); why is it that we lose hope when we see little or no change in praying for someone who remains separated from Christ? Our fears, frustrations, questions, and disappointments often combine like clouds to make the perfect storm for doubt. Some, like the disciples may succeed in awakening the Lord to their situation with, "Lord, don't you care?" only to hear Him ask, "Where is your faith?"

How many, like Jesus, will stand up to address the storm with confidence in God's Word, insisting on it because that is His will, resolute that anything opposing it must be overcome? Like the wind and the waves encountered by Jesus and His, our feelings and doubts may only be the smoke and mirror conjuring of powers purposed to prevent and destroy. Perhaps this is why Jesus used the same words here as he used to silence the demons, "Quiet! Be still!" In fact, the storm itself wasn't the point. It was only a roadblock to getting to what was on the other side. The opposite shoreline was not the goal. Rather it was the mission they were to accomplish once on the other side.

Once the barrier was resolved and they made it to their destination they were able to carry out the mission God sent them for. Not only did Jesus free the most demonized man in the Bible but He rid an entire region of their sacrificial supply. Whether Legion meant a literally 6000 or metaphorical "heck-a-lot of demons" this guy for whatever reason was packin'. After a bit of a skirmish the man was free and in his right mind again. Meanwhile the demons made their way toward the sea in their accommodated vessels. In trying to play the Master they were played, and in a big way.

(to be continued! I will update this in the near future so please check back. Thanks. I appreciate your patience. God Bless!)