

## Faith to Launch Out in 2018

August 10, 1628 was going to be a great day for the Swedish city of Stockholm. The mighty warship *The Vasa* was ready to set sail at last. The *Vasa* was over 180 feet long, carried over 400 men and had been commissioned by King Adolphus II to accomplish great things – to sail powerful seas and win mighty conquests for the glory of their king. As they got ready to launch large crowds began to line the docks and cheer as the *Vasa* weighed anchor and sailed gracefully away while Swedish fleets fired a gun salute.

The crowds were still whooping and cheering when a squall suddenly blew into the bay and, whipped by powerful winds, the ship began to list to portside to such a degree that before the surprised crew could redistribute the weight of the guns, the vessel started taking in water through the gun ports of the lowest deck. A few minutes after setting sail on its maiden voyage, a shocked crowd watched the *Vasa* sink below the sea.

Here we are one day before a New Year and as much as I enjoy the changing of the calendar and always experience a sense of optimism about what the New Year holds, there is a strange way the coming of a New Year reminds me of the ill-fated *Vasa*. Every New Year's Eve millions of optimists (like me) line up to launch another year with a lot of hyped up hopes about what adventures and conquests and accomplishments the year will hold and, of course, a lot of New Year resolutions that this year things are going to be different. But more often than not before the New Year even gets out of the bay, the squalls of life hit and our hyped up hopes and New Year resolutions sink right before our eyes.

Which is why on the opposite end of the spectrum a lot of people have simply given up on launching the New Year with any expectations. They've stopped hoping for new adventures or conquests; they see no point in making resolutions they're just going to break in a couple days. Tomorrow is just another day on the calendar, no sense in hyping it up to be something it's not. After all, if the *Vasa* had never launched, it never would have sunk.

I want to remind us this New Year's Eve that God has something better for us than either of these two extremes. He has something stronger than empty optimism and something more exciting than keeping our lives tied up to the dock. God has something that lies between hype and stagnation and it's called faith. The Bible says that without faith it is impossible to please God, so this morning as we stand on the dock ready to launch a New Year, let's read about another boat, another squall and another crew that were convinced they were going to sink, and some of the lessons Jesus taught them and for us about faith.

### Luke 8:22-25

The disciples had no idea what was in store for them as they got into the boat, they figured it'd just be an uneventful voyage to the other side of the lake. But God was going to use this trip to grow their faith by revealing His Son's power and authority to them. We have no idea what is in store for us in 2018. We might think we know, we might expect it to be fairly uneventful year, but really we don't know. But I think we can see this story in Luke as a kind of microcosm of our lives that teaches us four faith-building truths as we enter 2018.

#### I. Jesus is always with us

<sup>22</sup> *One day he got into a boat **with** his disciples... (vs. 22)*

One of the greatest promises Jesus gives us is that he will always be with us and never leave us. He tells us in Matt. 28:20 "*I am with you always, to the end of the age.*" Jesus never promised us that life would be easy or that nothing bad will ever happen to us. In fact, he said if we follow him we will experience trouble in this world. What he promises us is better than that: no matter what comes, he will be with us every step of the way. And he will be enough.

The most frequent command in the Bible is God telling us not to be afraid. Accompanying that command is this promise to God's people: I am with you. One of my favorites is Isa. 41:10 where God says:

*Fear not, for I am with you;  
be not dismayed, for I am your God;  
I will strengthen you, I will help you,  
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isa. 41:10*

Fear is a funny thing in that it hits us all but it hits us differently. Everyone of us has felt the icy fingers of fear creep over our hearts but probably not for the same things. Heights scare me. Certain types of heights have a physical effect on me – I get dizzy and vertigo real bad. Even watching someone else climb heights makes me dizzy. Some of you aren't bothered by heights at all. But there might be ways that fear gets to you that may not bother me at all. We all know fear – very few people are completely fearless – but it interacts with our hearts differently. What is the same for all of us is the antidote: knowing that our God is with us. Jesus will never leave us; he is always with us and that helps us overcome fear.

But knowing Jesus is always with us does more than just help conquer fear. We also see in the Bible that when God is about to launch His servants into a new place of ministry or service, He would build their confidence with the promise "I will be with you". For instance, when God called young Joshua to take Moses' place after Moses died, He assures him...

*<sup>3</sup>Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses... <sup>5</sup>No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. <sup>6</sup>Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them... <sup>9</sup>Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."*

Knowing that the Lord is with us and will never leave us helps conquer our fears and give us confidence that wherever He leads us we will succeed because He is with us. If we belong to Christ, then we can know with certainty that wherever 2018 or 2019 or 2030 takes us, he will be in the boat with us.

## **II. Jesus is calling us to launch out in new ways in 2018**

*...and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake."<sup>26</sup> Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes,<sup>[c]</sup> which is opposite Galilee. <sup>27</sup>When Jesus<sup>[d]</sup> had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. (vs. 22, 26-27)*

It's simple, but kinda profound: Jesus had them launch out from *this* side of the lake in order to get to *that* side of the lake. There was a purpose, a destination to their launch: in this case, a demoniac who needed to be delivered by Jesus. They were going *somewhere* to do *something* that God wanted done. If we're going to follow Jesus, the same will be true for us as well.

God's will isn't a landing pad where we hang out until we die. God's will is a launchpad to take us to specific destinations He has purposed for our lives. And as we launch out in God's will, we know that

Jesus will be with us to help us do what he calls us to do and go where he calls us to go.

The Lord has new destinations planned for you in 2018 and the great thing is He is with you to help you every step of the way. But you need to launch out, I need to launch out, if we're going to reach those destinations. He had the disciples push off from land and start sailing and in the same way we need to launch out with faith to take new territory for the Lord. That's not hype, that's just the way God has ordained it to work. God doesn't do everything for us, we have a part in following and obeying His will.

For the past several months we've been in a series called Practically Spiritual and the Lord may have used one or more of the messages to inspire you to launch out and take some practical steps to grow in those areas over the next year:

- Maybe after Mike's message on finances last week, you know the Lord is putting it on your heart to get your finances in order. Maybe get out of debt, or at least make progress towards the goal of getting out of debt. Don't worry about how far away the goal might seem – launch out with faith in that direction and trust in the Lord to help you make progress.
- Maybe God spoke to your heart through the messages I brought on parenting and you know there are ways you want to grow in your parenting. Or from Walt's messages on marriage you want to be a more loving husband or wife. Or God used Jeff's message to make you want to be a better worker.
- One of the messages we come back to time and again here at Grace is the importance of being connected relationally to the Lord and to one another. I hope and pray that the Lord puts it on all our hearts to take new ground in the area of connecting with one another. If you're not really connected, let me encourage you to take some practical steps – even just one practical step – to get more connected. Let's all ask the Lord to help us deepen and expand the connections we do have. And let's make it our goal to work together to help more people get connected relationally in Grace over the next year.
- And I think we all could say we want/need to grow in boldness and compassion to be a more outspoken witness for Christ to those around us who don't know the Lord. What an excellent goal it would be for us to commit to share the love of Christ with those we come in contact with and to pray that people we care about will come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

I don't know what this year holds but two things I feel I can say with certainty: first, the Lord doesn't want us to be in the same place a year from now that we are in now. Second, it will take intentionality on our part to launch out to discover and follow God's will. As a teacher I had once used to say, "it's easier to steer a moving ship than a stationary one." Let's have faith to launch out in 2018, trusting the Lord to guide us and bless us and use us as we do.

### **III. Jesus is Lord over every storm he allows into our lives**

*as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. <sup>24</sup> And they went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. <sup>25</sup> He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?" (vv. 23-25)*

The lake they are crossing is the Sea of Galilee which is 8 miles wide and 13 miles long and is 680 feet below sea level. It is surrounded by hills with deep ravines and strong winds are drawn through these ravines, which made sudden and violent storms commonplace. While Jesus and his disciples are crossing the lake, a violent squall suddenly kicks up. It was such a violent storm that hardened sailors

who were accustomed to being on the water in all sorts of elements feared for their lives. Luke in fact says that the boat was taking on water and they *were* in danger.

And Jesus is sleeping right through it! One of the gospel accounts records that they woke Jesus saying, "don't you care that we are perishing?" Sometimes when storms enter our lives we can feel like God must not care or He wouldn't have allowed the storm to come. When a storm or a trial goes on and on and there doesn't seem to be an answer, after a while we can be tempted to think that God has forgotten us. Why isn't He answering my prayers? Doesn't He care? Storms can, over time, erode our faith and confidence in God and make us feel like either He isn't strong enough to take the storm away, or doesn't care enough to take the storm away.

Let's consider this mysterious and dangerous storm for a moment. Many commentators believe that this storm was demonic in its origin because Jesus rebukes the storm with the same words he rebukes demons, and because he is crossing the lake to go to the Gerasenes where he will encounter a man who is possessed with a legion of demons. This whole account seems to have the confrontation between Jesus and powers of Satan woven into it. A question that arises is, do demons have the power to whip up storms? We do know from the book of Job that Satan killed Job's sons and daughters by a strong wind that collapsed the house. Beyond that, scripture seems to be silent about how much power Satan has over the weather.

So was this storm the result of natural causes or was it whipped up by demonic forces? The bottom line is we don't know. And we don't always know where the storms that hit our lives come from or why. I'm not talking meteorological storms, but the storms of life we all encounter in life and are sure at some point to encounter in 2018. Storms can enter our lives in so many different shapes: difficulties, challenges, stresses, disappointments, adversity, opposition, failure, sickness, betrayal, fear, temptation. Storms come, and they come in many shapes, but why do they come and what do they mean? Sometimes storms can indicate we've gotten out of God's will. God does bring discipline on His children, and I've seen cases where people have clearly sinned against God and suffered serious consequences. Sometimes when our lives are being battered by storm after storm we need to ask, *am I living in a state of disobedience to God in some area?* It's like that old saying, people sow their wild oats and then pray for crop failure. I've seen people blame God for not removing the consequences of their ongoing sinful choices. When we are in a state of active disobedience to God, the way out of the storm is to repent and return to where we know we departed God's will. There are storms that enter our lives because we're out of God's will.

But there are storms that enter our lives because we are *right in the middle of God's will*. The disciples were in the will of God: it was Jesus, after all, who suggested they cross the lake. Jesus wasn't taken off guard by this storm; he took them into it deliberately in order to demonstrate his power over the most powerful of elements so that their faith might be strengthened. Jesus stood up *and rebuked the wind and the raging waves and they ceased*. The wind heard Jesus and it obeyed him. The waves heard Jesus and they obeyed him. If they were stirred up by demonic powers, they were now being commanded by a far greater power and they had no choice but to humbly obey. God's purpose for the storm wasn't to destroy the disciples; His purpose for it was to display the power and glory of Christ.

When storms enter our lives, we can and should pray – like the disciples did – for the Lord to save us from it. But even if he allows it to go on long enough that we begin to take on water and are in danger, we can trust that the Lord Jesus Christ is sovereign over the storm and he will not allow it to destroy us. In the worst of storms we can have faith that God has not allowed it into our lives to destroy us but to display Christ's power and Lordship. Charles Spurgeon once preached these words: *In seasons of severe trial, the Christian has nothing on earth that he can trust to, and is therefore compelled to cast*

*himself on his God alone. When his vessel is on its beam-ends, and no human deliverance can avail, he must simply and entirely trust himself to the providence and care of God. Happy storm that wrecks a man on such a rock as this! O blessed hurricane that drives the soul to God and God alone! <sup>1</sup>*

When dangerous squalls blow into our lives may we cast ourselves fully and completely on God and our faithful Savior, trusting that Christ is Lord over every storm that he allows into our lives.

#### **IV. Trust that Jesus will bring us safely to the other shore**

<sup>26</sup> *Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes,<sup>[a]</sup> which is opposite Galilee. (vs. 26)*

We can trust God this day before 2018 that the Lord will bring us safely to the other side of 2018, but one day – we don't know when – we will all make our final journey and cross to the other side of eternity. Many of you know that my grandmother passed away two weeks ago, and at age 97 she was really ready to be with the Lord. My prayer for her had been that the Lord would lead her gently and peaceably across the river Jordan to the other side where the kingdom of God awaited her.

Listen, the day is going to come when every single one of us will come to the end of our earthly voyage and we'll be taking our last breath this side of eternity. We will cross the dark rivers of death to the other side. The strong promises of Christ will never be as sweet to our soul as they are in that moment. The Bible promises us that death is the gateway to eternal life for all those who place their trust in Christ.

Jesus came in order to bring all those who trust in him safely to the other side. Because God is holy and we are sinful, the terrible storm of God's wrath against sin awaited us on the other side, but Jesus faced that storm for us and bore God's wrath on the cross so that we might never have to. If you're not a Christian, the Bible promises us that if we trust in Christ we will be forgiven of all our sins and given the gift of eternal life. Romans 6:23 says *the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*. When a man desperately asked the Apostle Paul "what must I do to be saved?" Paul answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." Please don't put it off, reach out to Jesus in faith and ask him to show you that he is real and that he is the only way to God and the only way to eternal life.

Near the end of his life the Apostle Paul wrote, *The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. 2 Tim. 4:18* The Lord will bring us safely to the other shore, the eternal shores of his kingdom. I pray that's not 2018 for anyone here, but it's some year for all of us, barring the Lord's return. We can live every year confident that Jesus is preparing a place for us and one day when he has willed it – he will safely deliver us to the other shore. And I want to tell you, living this life is so much fuller and sweeter and better knowing that our short time on this earth isn't the end of line. And when we say goodbye to a loved one, this hope gives us such comfort knowing that we will see them again.

There's a poem written by a 19<sup>th</sup> century pastor named Henry Van Dyke about this:

*I'm standing on the seashore. A ship at my side spreads her white sails to the morning breeze and starts for the blue ocean. She's an object of beauty and strength and I stand and watch her until, at length, she hangs like a speck of white cloud just where the sea and the sky come down to mingle with each other. And then I hear someone at my side saying, "There, she's gone."*

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<sup>1</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening: Daily Readings*, "August 31", Complete and unabridged; New modern edition. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006).

*Gone where? Gone from my sight, that is all. She is just as large in mast and hull and spar as she was when she left my side. And just as able to bear her load of living freight to the place of destination. Her diminished size is in me, not in her.*

*And just at the moment when someone at my side says, "There, she's gone" there are other eyes watching her coming and there are other voices ready to take up the glad shout, "Here she comes!" That is dying. ~ Henry Van Dyke – Nineteenth century clergyman*

This year, and every year, we can trust that Jesus will one day bring us safely to the other shore. What a strong assurance that gives us. 2018 is almost here. 2017 is almost gone. Let's believe that God has new adventures and new territory for us to take in 2018 and then let's launch out with faith in Christ to always be with us, to guide us in his purposes, to keep us through the storms, and to bring us safely to the other side of 2018 and ultimately, one day, to the other side of eternity. Let's bow our hearts in prayer.