



The Omnipotent Christ-Part 1

Confident in His Power to Sustain

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Well, it is real good to be back. I know I've been gone a little bit, which felt like—I think this kind of—felt like days in some ways, and in other ways it felt like months. And perhaps it was years based on a conversation I had with a waitress while I was gone.

What I mean is this: I'm having breakfast at IHOP of all places out of town, and my wife and my daughter with me, and I order my pancakes as I always do. And she looks at me and she says, "Will that be off the seniors menu?" What are you talking about? The seniors menu started—35 or under—what were you talking about? "The seniors menu." Yeah, and if you met my daughter—my granddaughter? I mean, I was like, "No, I'm ordering off the seniors menu? You kidding me? Like asking if you're pregnant." That was just the wrong thing to ask me. I—I mean, I didn't understand that. I'm like, "Man, I'm in my 40s. Do you understand that, lady? I'm in my—" the last year of my 40s, actually the last few days of my 40s, but I'm in my 40s. I don't order off the seniors menu.

Yeah, I was—I just thought, "Man, I've aged that much while I've been gone?" It was really weird. You know, spent a lot of time researching where the senior discount starts during that meal. It was not a good meal. I did not enjoy that day. The—see, it was the first time—the seniors menu. I later regretted it because I could have saved two bucks on my breakfast. But I didn't like the way they thought. You know, I just was aging exponentially while I was gone.

Well, you know another way it feels like years—because if you just stacked up the headlines from the news in the last few weeks, while I've been gone, it's like those are the kinds of headlines you could stretch out over a year. I mean, the things that have been happening in the world. And I know I try to read the news when I'm on vacation and when I'm here, but it was like every day it was a new, like, huge crisis. It was amazing, the things I was reading.

Of course, you have the war going on—Israel and Gaza lobbing bombs. You've got Putin on the march in Ukraine. You've got all kinds of things happening in our government—you're starting to bomb Iraq. You know, the Ebola comes to the United States, and we're watching people in hazmat suits with people, putting them into hospitals in our country. We've got riots in Missouri—they're calling up the National Guard. Then it got really scary when you started hearing about and seeing pictures of them beheading American journalists on the news. And you go to the internet—you can see the gruesome



reality of it all. They're literally crucifying Christians in Mosul. Right? Did you see some of those pictures? It was just like every day was a new thing. And you had typhoons killing people in Japan. You had an earthquake in Northern California, one of the biggest we've had in a long time. We had hurricanes in Hawaii. I mean, I leave for a few weeks and the world falls apart, it seems.

And, you know, people start asking, "Where is Christ in all this? Where's God?" These are bleak and foreboding, really terrible headlines. I mean, Franklin Graham writes an article—as we know—"Is the world coming to an end? It's falling apart at the seams." And I think, you know, that's sort of how it feels. And people—not just non-Christian, but Christians—say, "Where's your God in all this? Can Christ do anything about all this stuff?" I mean, this is real egregious stuff. I mean, natural disasters—can he do anything about this?

I mean, we have real trouble in Missouri; they call out the National Guard to quell, you know, the riots. I mean, can the Christ of your Christianity be called in to quell anything in this world? That means the National Guard is more powerful than Christ—is that what Christians are admitting? Where is God in all this?

And I'd say, well, most people think the National Guard is more powerful than the Christ of modern Christianity because we view him a lot like the religious people that step forward about all the Middle Eastern wars that have gone on in the last, you know, few months, saying, "Well, please boys and girls, can't we get along? Can you put down your—your—put down your shoulder—you know, launching rockets—just, you know, stop fighting. Let's all be friends. Can we hold hands?" And you see these passages—priests in their robes and their sandals—and some people say, "Well, there's your Christ: he's on the sidelines, just kind of begging people, 'Please stop. Please, everybody, you're being too violent. Things are terrible here on earth.'" And he's wringing his hands. I mean, that's kind of the view of modern Christianity. And I think to myself, well, if that's the case, then I think a lot of people say, "I don't know that he can do anything about it."

One of the reasons we feel that is really answered for us in the passage we finally reached in our study of Luke in chapter 8, beginning in verse 22. We're gonna get three scenes in Luke chapter 8 here in a very short series we're starting today that I've entitled "The Omnipotent Christ." And that's an interesting description of Christ in a scene that I've just painted—as the world, quote-unquote, is falling apart at the seams and Christ is seemingly passive on the sidelines and doing nothing about it. And people ask, "Can he do anything about it? You're praying to a God that doesn't seem to be very responsive to people." And yet, in this passage, we have a lot of answers.



Now, they don't always come with the most obvious point in the passage. In other words, as it's taught on the flannel graphs down the hall—I say that; no, they don't use flannel graphs anymore down the hall—but they've taught the story here that we're going to read this morning and study, verses 22 through 25, the story of Jesus calming the storm. I mean, kids learn that. If they go to church, they learn that right away. This is very dramatic, very interesting. It's a—it's a wow kind of story. And that's on the surface. But there's so much surrounding this that I think will really help us understand the consternation, the questioning, the head-scratching that sometimes goes on. "And why is it that your God isn't seemingly active in all this? Why isn't Christ stopping this? If God really is powerful, if Christ really is omnipotent, then you guys are asking him to fix these things, and he's not doing it."

So let's take a look at this passage afresh and see if we can just not come away with the basic idea of what happens, but also look at some of the details and see how all this works together. Verses 22 through 25—you follow along as I read it for you. Let's look at this afresh and consider it carefully, beginning in verse 22:

"One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, 'Let us cross to the other side of the lake.' And they set out. And as they sailed, he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. 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. 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 the winds and the water, and they obey him?'"

Now, the way this ends—with the disciples saying "Amazing—who is this?"—that is the lesson that is normally taught. And it comes at the bottom of verse 24: that he can wake up out of a dead sleep, rebuke wind and waves, and they obey him—they stop. That's the remarkable part of this passage. And I want to start there, because there's a lot to learn there. But when we put it together with the rest of the text, I think we'll come away understanding what's going on in the world headlines today.

But let's deal with the obvious. You've got someone who's being transported in the hull of the boat here in this fishing vessel, and he's looking like any ordinary first-century rabbi in sandals and a robe. And he wakes up, says something, and a storm just goes flat. What's with that? That's amazing. With a word he commands the natural elements.



Now, that's a good place to start, and it's important for us to do that. So let's put it that way: number one, let's reconsider—let's rethink—let's ponder for a little bit this morning the authority of Christ that is depicted in this passage. Reconsider the authority of Christ, because it's quite remarkable to have a man who just looks like some bearded, brown-eyed rabbi, who can wake up and speak to nature. I mean, you tell your kids to clean their room and it's a 50/50 chance whether they'll even move when you say that. You certainly can't talk to clouds and winds and have them obey. You can't get your employees half the time to do something, or your neighbors or whatever it is—you speak, and maybe something happens. And you certainly can't speak to inanimate objects and have them respond. And yet here is someone with authority in his word that makes a storm stop. That's a remarkable depiction of a kind of authority that you wouldn't expect in that container—and by container, I mean a rabbi, a human being.

Now, when I was gone, Elliot—Pastor Elliot—if you were here, I trust you, you dipped into Philippians chapter 2. And he taught you about something that we often call in theology the *kenosis* of Christ. And we use those terms, but the word *kenosis* is at the center of that unique text of the humbly—second person of the Godhead—taking on human form. You remember that passage? If not, I know it's a familiar text; we don't have time to turn there. But think through that passage. It describes Christ—the Christ that's in a boat, wakes up and commands the waves—as being at one time, here's how it's put, “in the form of God.”

Now, that can't be literal, because we've learned throughout the New Testament—God has no form, and certainly in the Old Testament that's the truth. He is spirit. As Isaiah put it, heaven and the highest heavens can't contain him—he has no form. So we're not talking about physical form. It's not physics here we're talking about. We're talking about whatever it is that defines God—whatever the parameters are, philosophically, theologically, of who God is—that “form,” whatever makes a god or the God—that is who the second person of the Godhead was.

But then—ESV translates it, at least the most recent iteration of it—it says “he emptied himself.” Do you remember that? Smile at me if you remember—Elliot told me he preached on that; maybe he was lying to me. He did preach on that while I was gone: “emptied himself.” I think the first edition of the ESV put it the way I think the NIV put it, and that is, “he made himself nothing.” That's the *kenosis*. But theologians have been trying to describe and figure out what does it mean that God, in the second person of the Godhead, empties himself?

And on the other side, there's the other description of “form.” Now he's in the likeness of man, in the form of a bondservant. He's like your average, you know, servant—slave. You've got whatever defines a God—not “a god,” *the* God—through this word called *kenosis*, “emptied himself,” and the word



“humbling,” which is the mentality that Paul’s trying to—Pastor Elliot—get the congregation in Philippi to adopt. He willingly does this for a redemptive purpose so that he can die in our place as a human sacrifice to atone for sin. But he comes out in that earthly ministry in the form of a servant, in the likeness of men, being so humbled in the process that he’s willing to die. You want to talk about weakness—death—pretty weak. Even death on the ignoble cross.

If you’re bold enough to search the internet to see the Christians that are being crucified in Mosul, it’s nothing compared to what you would have taken in and gasped at the crucifixion of Christ—beaten, unrecognizable. His back was filleted open, his flesh was open, and he was absolutely 100% naked on that cross. Now think this through: he there—you want to talk about weakness and impotence—he there on a cross, humble. You want to talk about something that does not look like power and authority—there it was. And the word is *kenosis*. The word is “he emptied himself.”

Now think this through: the Christ we’re dealing with in Luke chapter 8, verses 22 through 25, is what we have in this unique situation where deity is camouflaged, deity is veiled. The power and authority of the God that you might expect could command inanimate objects and have them respond, is now in a form that you don’t expect to have that power. He is now veiled; he is camouflaged. He doesn’t look like Almighty God. The only time he peeled back the curtain, if you will, to show that he has the glory of God was at a little scene called the Transfiguration. Remember that? He goes on a mountaintop and goes—whoa—and they freak out. You want to talk about getting a sense of what it looks like to have a glorified, all-powerful being before you—that was the moment. And they fell on their faces, and they wanted to build a worship center there. And then he goes, “Okay, show’s over.” Go back to looking like a humble Jewish rabbi who’s subject to the authorities of the Pharisees and will be crucified on the cross. It’s deceptive.

Now here’s the problem. You want to think about the power of Christ—you picture him in that humble state. And all I have to tell you is: that’s a very temporary picture of Christ. Near the end of the earthly ministry, he prayed in John 17, “Now that I’m going to go to the cross and I’m going to die and I’m going to be resurrected, you can restore to me the glory I had at first.” Now think this through—glory. We’ve talked a lot about glory in the past. The Hebrew word *kābōd* means literally “weight.” We don’t use it in a literal sense, but in a philosophical, descriptive sense—like “gravitas.” There’s a similar analogy: the weightiness, the majesty, the importance, the dignity of someone. The glory of God would be the weightiness and the gravitas of the Almighty God. He had that form—he had that picture, he had that definition—before the incarnation. Then he went in a complete deceptive package—and I don’t mean deceptive in an immoral way—but it was a camouflaged, veiled deity. And then it was done. Then he had the glory he had at first.



And when John met him in the glorified state after the resurrection on the island of Patmos in Revelation chapter 1—which would be a good chapter to review this week—the glorified, all-powerful Christ appears in a very different form than the one that Peter had eaten fish with many times. He would lean back, and they would sit there—and I’ve illustrated it for you before—they would have these meals together and it would be very copacetic, very casual. “Hey Jesus, how was your day?” Now John falls on his face as though he’s dead and describes him this way: his face is like the sun, his eyes are like fire, his hair is like wool—white—and his voice is like the sound of many waters. This is not a babbling brook. This is like Niagara Falls—*ahhh*—when he speaks. His voice is like the sound of many waters. And then he adds another description of his voice: and out of his mouth—you know the passage—comes a sharp, two-edged sword. Think about that. I mean, that’s a weird picture—he’s talking, a big sword comes out. What’s the picture? The power of his word as a glorified entity—the second person of the Godhead. There’s no doubt he’s powerful.

Here’s the problem: you see the headlines, you see guys with black hoods on cutting people’s heads off, and you think, “Oh, Christ, stop this.” We picture the earthly itinerant rabbi from Galilee. Stop thinking that way. It’s not that way at all. He is the all-powerful God of the universe, who creates with a word and destroys with a word and possesses all power. And he proves it in situations like this—that even inanimate objects will respond to his simple request. In this case: “Stop.” He doesn’t tell us what he says—he rebukes the waves, they cease—done. And even the waves will stop.

If you’ve ever been in a storm where the wind suddenly stops—which sometimes, you know, just naturally that may happen—you notice: if there are whitecaps on the lake or on the sea, they don’t stop. It takes a long time, even on the Sea of Galilee, to have those waves stop rocking. And here, with a word—this is not, as we’ve talked about miracles—we’ve talked about first-class miracles (we call them God thing one—GT1s—and GT2s). This is certainly a miracle of the first order, a GT1, in that the laws of buoyancy and the laws of waves and physics are absolutely nullified. This is like the sun standing still in Joshua’s day. You have the instantaneous molecular control of everything on that lake, and with a word, it’s flat and placid and the wind stops.

That’s the word coming out of the mouth of someone they say (verse 25), “Does not compute. Who is this?” He’s done a lot of things already to prove that he’s a miracle worker, but “Who is this, that even the winds and the water obey him?” This is not anyone normal. This isn’t just a great prophet. This is the all-powerful one.

Quick passage on this: 2 Peter chapter 3. When you turn to 2 Peter chapter 3, I want you to put in the margin Psalm 104. In Psalm 104 we define Yahweh—we define the God of the Bible—and it’s a psalm of worship about that God. And he’s described as the creator and the destroyer: the creator and the one



who floods the world. And it says in that passage that God, the majestic one—who in that passage is described as majestic and splendorous and very great—is able to create the world, and then when they get sinful, he’s able to flood the world. And as that passage says, the waters rose over the tops of the mountains. And—with a word—then here’s the interesting thing from Psalm 104:6–7: as the waters came over the mountaintops and the flood was over, verse 7 says, “At your rebuke those waters fled away.” That’s the God of the Old Testament. Genesis chapter 6 through 8—he floods the world in judgment with a word. He created the world in his creativity with a word.

And now, in 2 Peter chapter 3, we have the description of all of this, and the description is given in light of the people who say, “Where’s your God in all of this?” Now, they’re thinking about, “Hey, everything’s going on (verse 4) the way it has from the beginning of creation. Things go on and your God is not intervening. There’s no kingdom coming. There’s no monarch coming out of the sky. There’s no establishment of some new world order here. Where’s your God? Where’s the promise of his coming? Everything since the fathers fell asleep is still the same.”

Verse 5: well, when they say that kind of thing, they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God. With a word he creates—which, by the way, is an expression of what’s going on in every creative miracle Christ ever did. He’s speaking things into existence that have beauty, organization, and usefulness. With a word he’s making those things appear out of nothing. That’s the kind of thing that God did. And then Paul says in Colossians, you know what? The fullness of deity dwelt in him in bodily form. As a matter of fact, he creates all things, sustains all things; all things were created by him and for him. That’s how John’s Gospel starts as well. Christ has the power with a word to create.

And (verse 6) “by means of these”—what? His word—because, by the way, if you study the creation, he does it with a series of words over a six-day period—he’s creating, creating, creating—“by means of these the world that then existed was deluged”—was flooded; was judged. It was deluged with water and it perished. Notice that: the word creates; the word destroys and judges. Verse 7: “By the same word”—by the same word—“the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire”—different kind of judgment. The rainbow says no more flooding judgment of the whole planet, but there is a burning judgment of the whole planet. “And it is being kept until the day of judgment and the destruction of the ungodly.”

So with a word it all comes to an end. With a word he doesn’t just, through some chaotic, you know, kicking of the dog, destroy the world—he carefully, judiciously, in a very measured way, judges every sinful act. And because of the cross, there’s a few of us that get out of it without any punishment—but



the rest of the world, they get—with an exacting judgment—the justice of God, and it's done with a word.

Do you think God could take those that hoisted up the beheaded heads of people, or the villages that are surrounded because they name the name of Christ—do you think he could take those people with their weapons in their hands and their knives and their machine—do you think he could slay them all with a word? Yeah. Don't think of some, you know, pacifist priest with sandals on—that's not the Christ of the New Testament; certainly not the kind who has been glorified post-resurrection. It's the one who uses that word that is like a sword in Revelation chapter 19.

By the way, Jesus isn't a pacifist—this whole thing ends with a war. I don't know if you've read chapter 19 of Revelation. And he ends the injustice in the world. And as it's put poetically in Isaiah: every crooked thing straight, every rough place plain, every high place made low, every low place raised up—he makes all things right with the word of his power. He doesn't have to lift a finger; he just needs to speak. That's the picture of the Christ of the Bible. That's the picture of Christ in Luke chapter 8, verses 22 through 25. He speaks and commands the molecules of nature itself to do whatever he says. We don't have an impotent Christ—we have an omnipotent Christ.

Which leaves us with some philosophical problems: well, if he can fix the problem, why isn't he fixing the problem? And that's a whole 'nother sermon—would be good to read a book on that recently done—the idea of understanding why a God who can change circumstances chooses not to. Let me just say, even in 2 Peter 3, Peter can't get out of that situation without saying, you know, all of this patience of God and the chaos that ensues is all for an overarching, good, caring reason. It's about his patience. It's about bringing people to a redemptive point through repentance. He is someone who wants a good plan and will accomplish a good plan. But the interim has a lot of evil in it. It's all under his control. It's all under his sovereignty. There's a lot to that—I gave you sermons on the back that will delve into that. There's a lot that you should consider in that. If it's a new problem for you—it's solvable.

My point this morning is, though, that the Christ who stands by and reserves the current economy for his coming judgment is one that is not impotent to intervene. It's that he chooses for now not to. But I guarantee you this—as I like to quote from Revelation chapter 11—he will take his great power and begin to reign. It's future. It's when the kingdom comes.

Reconsider the authority of Christ. I could spend a lot of time on that—I have, actually. If you haven't gone through some of our systematic teaching on Thursday nights in the past, go to Focal Point and



download those series of sermons— they’re all for free—on Christology. We’ll spend a lot of time in Christology talking about the divinity of Christ, the power of Christ, the sovereignty of Christ. That would be a great series to bathe your mind in, so that you can walk away knowing that the “Christ” that most people envision in modern Christianity is not the Christ that really exists. He is all-powerful. He is omnipotent.

Now, that’s the story I think our kids learn down the hallway: “Look at this—Christ can make the waves calm. He can command the waves and make them obey. He is powerful.” And the kids walk out: “Christ is all-powerful.” That’s great. There’s a lot we missed, though. And I’d like to go to verses 22 and 23 of Luke chapter 8 and just note some things here that may be a bit more surprising to the average Christian—certainly in our day, when a lot of people are talking about what’s supposed to happen when you follow Christ. Let’s look carefully at what happens when these disciples follow Christ. And let’s note the grammar carefully.

Verse 22: one day he gets into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” So they set out. Next to the words “so they set out,” you can just note in your own mind—or maybe on your Bible margin—“they obeyed him.” They did what he said.

Now think about this: they’re about to get caught in a storm. This storm—when they’re in the storm, he’s asleep—the Messiah—the all-powerful one. The windstorm comes down on the lake (verse 23). They’re filling with water—and they were in danger. They were in danger because Christ told them to go out on a boat. They were obediently following Christ, and they were in a storm. I’m thinking, “If you’re so smart, Jesus, didn’t you know there was a storm coming? Didn’t you understand that we would have a problem here on the lake? Didn’t you know we’d be bailing water out of the boat in just a matter of hours? We are stuck in a storm because you told us to go.”

I’m thinking to myself, this is the problem we Christians sometimes have: we think that if we follow Christ and obey Christ, it will minimize the trouble and turbulence in our world and in our lives. The Bible says just the opposite and illustrates it here. And that is: they were in turbulent waters because they were obeying Christ.

Number two on your outline: if you’re here saying, “I want to follow Christ; I want to obey Christ,” then expect turbulent times. Expect it—expect it personally, expect it corporately, and expect it as a citizen of planet Earth. Because according to the Bible, that’s exactly what’s on schedule for us. It is what Jesus taught us time and time again.



I'm thinking to myself, I could have walked around to the other side of the lake. As a matter of fact, let's just say one of the disciples said—you're getting into the boat—"Well, I'm an experienced fisherman. I'm looking at the horizon. I'm seeing storm clouds starting to form. I'm afraid we might have a big storm. That wouldn't be good for us. So I'm going to disobey you and not get in the boat, and I'm going to walk around. Just tell me where you're going to go and I'll meet you over there." That guy would have avoided the storm. Oh, he may have gotten some rain. He could have ducked under some trees. He could have ducked into someone's house. He could have been shielded from the wind behind some rocks. But he would not have been in fear of his life if he had disobeyed.

Do you see the point I'm making here? Obedience does not exempt you from trouble. As a matter of fact, obedience often creates the trouble. Obedience often leads you into the trouble. Jesus is leading them into a storm. If you want a heading for this—here's another heading besides "Jesus calms the storm": "Jesus leads the disciples into a storm." That could be another editorial title. That's why they're never asking me to translate Bibles and add headings to them, right? But that would be legitimate: Jesus leads the disciples into a storm. It's exactly what's happening here.

Now, a little speculative theology here. There's something that happens here that may even up the ante further—and I don't want to make too much of this, and again I'm speculating—but when we read the way Jesus responds to the storm, the word that is used in Jesus's mouth and is penned by Luke in this passage, it says there in verse 24, he "rebuked" the wind, and then he adds this descriptive about the waves—they are the "raging" waves—and there's a response. That's the same word "rebuke" that is used often and repeatedly by Luke recording the words of Christ in response to demonic activity—when there's something going on that is clearly satanic, and he responds with rebuking it. Now, that's a pretty strong word.

And I'm just saying for just a second: maybe it's not just that obedience doesn't exempt us from trouble, and obedience may lead us into trouble, but maybe the cause—to be more specific—is you're in a boat with Christ. That's the problem. And I say that because after the temptation of Satan and Christ, Satan leaves Christ and makes this promise—at least all the descriptives about this scene says—Satan left him "for a more opportune time." So now we're going to look for another opportunity to destroy him. And here's the thing: you're in a boat with Christ—a Christ that has been targeted by Satan himself.

Is it that Satan would ever use a storm to destroy someone? Here's a word for you: Job. Remember Job chapter 1? Job is a righteous man. You're talking about someone who's righteous going into stormy,



turbulent times—that’s Job. Let’s be more specific: he gets permission—Satan does—to harass Job. And he goes out in chapter 1 and uses a storm to really devastate Job’s heart by killing his children. His children are killed by a storm. You could call that a GT2—well, you wouldn’t call it a GT2—you got an SD2; it’s really getting ridiculous now, but you’re following me, right? This is a Satan thing of the second category. It’s a natural event, but the natural event is timed at a particular place where it causes some kind of objective that was intended by a demonic being that—as we’ve looked at in the past as we studied angelology and demonology—is certainly a pattern in the Bible. Sometimes natural disasters are the tools of the enemy. And perhaps Satan is going after the sleeping Messiah on this boat.

One of the reasons you may add to that speculative theory is because the disciples—we know it’s not just a bunch of tax collectors—we have very experienced (and several) fishermen among the group who fished on the Sea of Galilee as a profession. This is an unusual storm—so unusual they’re fearing for their lives. And if there’s someone who does not want to lose face and act like they’re dying and perishing on the lake, it would be Peter in front of Matthew. It would be James and John in front of Thomas. They’d be like, “We know—we sail this lake all the time; these storms happen. This is a big one; trust us.” You would have that. Instead, they’re all thinking they’re going to die. This is almost like a supernatural, over-the-top, unexpected storm.

And all I’m saying—I’m just speculating here, and I’m doing it based on some principles of the Bible—is that Satan is the real antagonist, and Christ is the real target. And you want to stand with Christ—you’re going to be targeted. And that started, in my thinking, in our study of Luke, when Simeon took the baby Jesus on the Temple Mount—remember that?—and gave a prophetic word to Mary and said this: “This child is appointed for the rise and fall of many in Israel”—going to divide people, polarize people—“and he’s a sign”—you know what a sign is? “There it is, see it”—to be opposed. Here’s another word for a sign that’s opposed: a target. He will be a target. And here’s the thing: when you’re near the target, you are subject to all the stuff that’s thrown at the target.

You’d do better in this chaotic world being a non-Christian—is all I’m telling you. You do understand what a lot of the persecution around the world is focused on is not just Westerners and Americans, but the infidels and the Christians who claim the name of Christ. Those are the towns they encircle. Those are the girls they kidnap. Those are the people they rape and murder. Those are the folks they can’t wait to behead. Why? In our news headlines—because they name the name of Christ.

Reminds me of the old football game—and I can remember this because I’m a senior now—back in 1982. Remember the Cal–Stanford football game? That famous football game when, at the end on the very last play of the game, all those laterals after that onside kick, and the marching band (or—the marching band) comes on the field too early—the Stanford band—remember that? If you’ve seen



that—young people, look it up on YouTube: 1982 Cal Bears against Stanford. And they had this game, and Cal does all these laterals, and the marching band's coming out, and they come on the field. Now, there are saxophone players and tuba players and trombone players—they're just there to play their horns, right? That's all they're there to do. They didn't expect—they didn't put on their outfit that day and think they were going to tackle. That's not what they thought.

But here's the thing: they can avoid that if they just stay off the field. Matter of fact, I've watched enough football to know—you want to stay, like, kind of way off the field, because sometimes it just splatters over the edges of the field. So they think, "Well, okay, I can get through the day without, you know, breaking any bones if I just stay away from the action." Well, here's an example in real time—look it up on YouTube—where they come onto the field, and if you're too close to that little oblong pigskin thing called a football, and they're still playing, you're going to get your trombone smashed, your saxophone messed up, and you may break your jaw—because that's the target. Everyone's focused on it. And big men who worked out all week with pads are running really fast and are going to hurt you—because you're too close to the football.

See, that's the thing: you don't want trouble—stay away from the football. You're following the one that's carrying the ball. You're saying, "I want to identify and align myself with Christ." I know we've taught this principle a lot, and it should go without saying, but in a day where thousands of people fill stadiums because they think if you get with Christ things will go better for you, I just want to tell you—that makes no sense biblically. You get next to the one that everyone wants to tackle—go and attack—you're going to be—you better put down your flute and get some pads on, because it gets real rough when you stand next to Christ.

One more thing on this before I leave this point. Matthew 24—real quick; got to speed up here. We're expecting turbulent times, and we're expecting that not only in terms of people that are hating and persecuting—you know, whatever it might be—the political scene or the moral legislation or the terrorists or whatever you're seeing in the world—it's not just moral decisions; there's natural evil, and it's something the Bible says, "Look out for it."

Matthew 24—remember this scene here? Verse number 3: he—Jesus—sat on the Mount of Olives (that's across the Kidron Valley from the Temple Mount). They're talking about the temple—chapter 23. And the disciples come to him privately—they say, "Hey, tell us"—middle of verse 3—"When will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered, "See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars." Now I want you to underline the next six words: "See that you are not alarmed." Interesting—he could have said this:



“Don’t be alarmed.” It’s even stronger than “Hey, manage your emotions, and you better control your thoughts.” “See to it that you are not alarmed.” Why? “For this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom”—those are all moral evils—sometimes you’ve got to go to war against the bad guys. And all of that is because there are sinful decisions in the world. But keep reading: “There will be famines and earthquakes”—and typhoons and hurricanes, fill in the blank—all the naturally genetic disorders, diseases, all of that. “And these are but the beginning of the birth pangs.”

You want to stick with the headlines? Think of all those bad things in the headlines that seemed to be compounded over the past few weeks. And the Bible says all of that is the beginning of birth pangs. Think about that, moms—the beginning of birth pangs. “How far apart are they?” Why? Because they’re going to get closer together. They’re going to become more accelerated and more frequent. They’re going to multiply. The Bible says this: when it comes to turbulent times, they will accelerate.

I mean, there are some great passages—I don’t have time for all these—but if you think about the breakdown in the book of 1 and 2 Timothy: 2 Timothy says this—when it comes to non-Christians, they will become increasingly pagan; they will become increasingly sinful. Then it says in 1 Timothy chapter 3—Christians—I shouldn’t say that—religious people will be increasingly prone to defecting from the truth and becoming followers of cults and false religions. So increasing cults and false and counterfeit religions; increasing sinfulness from the secularists. And then lastly, 2 Timothy chapter 4—real churches, true churches—churches that preach the word—man, people are not going to have an appetite for it. There’ll come a time when they will not tolerate it. They will complain; they will persecute; they will shut. So you’ve got sinful secular people getting worse and more immoral; you’ve got religious kind of spiritual people falling into increasing lies—spiritual lies and religious cults; and you’ve got the true church being increasingly persecuted—people hating it more and more. That’s what’s predicted. Those are the birth pangs that are promised for us.

Now, look at the passage there in verse number 6 that I just turned you to—and hopefully you underlined those six—“See that you are not [alarmed].” That’s your goal. Back to our passage with that in mind. Is that what the disciples did? No.

Luke chapter 8, verse 24 and 25—we saw the second half of both of those verses: he rebuked the wind and the waves, they ceased; and they end in verse 25, saying, “Who is this that does that? Amazing—he must have all power and authority.” But the reason this was provoked was in verse 24, because they woke him up, saying, “Master, Master, we’re perishing! Oh, help!” He wakes up (verse 24), rebukes the wind and the waves—they cease.



Then verse 25—read carefully, verse 25—“And he”—wakes up, hugs them, says, “Oh there, there, my child; I’m sorry you were freaked out. That was a bad storm. I’m sorry, I was just—I didn’t catch it early. Are you okay now? Let me read you some Psalms.” Is that what he does? No. You get no compassion at all from Christ in this text. All of the fear in a raging storm—that’s certainly understandable. Christ, though, says it may be understandable; it is inexcusable. Why? Because you claim to be a follower of me. You claim to have put your trust in me. My rebuke for you is a rhetorical question: “Where is your faith?” Clearly it’s absent. You don’t trust me.

Number three on your outline: you want to not be alarmed as the world continues to get worse—here comes number three—you need to determine to trust Christ implicitly. Implicitly—without reservation, without conditions. And I say it that way, and I mean that—as the world says, “Come hell or high water,” right? No matter what happens—come what may—I will trust Christ.

I try to, from time to time, whenever the topic is germane, on the back of your worksheet in the box at the bottom, I try to give you books every now and then—I know it gets redundant—but I give you books on the martyrs. I think that’s important regular-diet reading for Christians: Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*—start there if you haven’t read that one. You better start there. Go into the other books I put out there on martyrs. And here’s just a few—I’ve got a whole shelf of them. Why? Because they help to give us the steely resolve, like they had, not to deal with opposition as sissies—as fearful, scared disciples saying, “We’re going to perish”—but like the martyrs of the church did. *Martyr*, by the way, means witness. They witnessed not only to Christ, but they were witnesses of their faith in Christ. They got burned at the stake—and they did it with a calm resolve. They had their limbs torn off—with a calm resolve. They were crucified upside down—with a calm resolve and trust in Christ that, come what may—even if you take my life—that’s the worst you can do. That’s all you can do. We’re going to trust Christ, come what may. That’s our job. Jesus rebukes them because they are missing the key ingredient of the Christian life, which is your and my obligation to trust Christ no matter what.

When things get turbulent—in the news, through the porous borders of America, on American shores—when there’s a pandemic of some kind of, you know, virus strain; when the big one—San Andreas Fault or some other fault we don’t even know about yet in Southern California—breaks loose, and it’s not just Napa but it’s an 8.0, and half of this Southern California basin is destroyed, and death is everywhere; when some device goes off—because there’s some news that exploded in LA—when the bad things really start ramping up, like increasing birth pangs, I just want to tell you: our job is to trust Christ implicitly. “But he doesn’t seem to be doing anything.” Yes—the current order of things is kept and reserved, because one day he’s going to speak a word, and every hooded terrorist, every evil cell, everything that is against what is good—and he’s going to fix it all with a word. Your job is to trust him. You have to look forward to what’s coming.



I don't have time to turn you there, but there's a great line where Jesus tells the people about all the things they can worry about. He says, "Fear not, little flock"—love that—"for it was the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Think about this: you don't have a baby to have to go into labor. You don't get pregnant and conceive a child so that you can go through the pain of labor. The point is the child. The passageway is the labor. When it comes to us looking at all the things that scare us, the end result is the kingdom. We're praying every day for it—we're looking forward to it. The kingdom is coming. That's the thing we pin our hopes on, and we can't wait for the joy of the kingdom.

And you know how it ends—Jesus gave us the forecast. And when you know how it ends, it changes everything. I think about—recently my kids got into *Jeopardy!* Oh, I don't know—hopefully it's over—but they had this thing where my boys got into *Jeopardy!* because they were starting to get some of the questions. And so, you know, we don't watch much TV as a family, but you know what we do watch—we usually record on TiVo because we don't want to go through all the commercials. So my wife goes, "Oh, we can record that on TiVo." And so we record it, and when we get a chance—we've got six or seven of them now stacked up—and we can watch them.

So one night this summer, right, we finish cleaning up the kitchen and we've got some downtime, and I'm not preaching about—lead meetings—my wife's not doing Bible study. So we say, "Well, let's watch some TV," and we decide to watch some TiVo **Jeopardy!*s*. Well, that night just so happened my son John—right? Junior in high school—he's out doing something. I don't know—he's somewhere, gone. So we watch a couple *Jeopardy!*—*Jeopardy!*—"That was cool, I guess." And we went on with whatever we're doing that night.

Well, a couple nights later, we're having dinner—and again, hey, this is great, two nights in one week—we are free. "Hey, let's sit down." We've cleaned up the kitchen. "Let's watch a little TV." "Hey, let's watch some *Jeopardy!*" And as I got the remote control, I winked at my daughter and my son, and now John is there, and we started watching the one we watched two nights ago. My family deserves an Academy Award, because even my daughter, who's in sixth grade—perfect. I winked at them—John did not see it.

Now, you say, "That's so mean." No, no, it's not mean at all, because John is the smarty-pants in our family. He's the guy who sits there, and he's the guy who got into it. So he's doing *Jeopardy!* every day—he's like: "Jansen—bull—mitochondria." He knows these things. The Oslo Accord—he's got all the answers, it seems. Well, now we had all the answers. And Stephanie's the one saying, whatever—"The Treaty of Versailles." She's got the answers coming out of her mouth. And we did not miss a



question. If Stephanie could remember it, my wife—she’s in the kitchen; she’s not quite finished doing something—and she’s yelling out from the kitchen, “Chuck wagon!” Yeah—she’s got the answers to this.

And John—Mr. Smart Boy—he starts getting frustrated. “Oh, I didn’t know that. Oh wow.” He’s looking at his sister, visibly upset that he feels like the idiot for once in our family. It took him about 15—it took about half an episode for him to finally catch on. And he’s the kind—he’s kinetic and he’s physical—he gets an “Ah-ha! How do you know that?” He’d get, like, one of every five, which is probably normal for most of us—ashamed normally. But now we’re getting every single one of them. And he finally—he gets it: “You guys have watched this!” And we busted up laughing.

Now, here’s the thing: the whole point of predictive prophecy in the Bible is not just to impress you with God’s knowledge of the future. It’s not just to say God is sovereign and in charge—it’s to calm your heart. Because every problem, every thorny issue, every “Oh, what’s going to happen?”—it’s all been laid out. The whole point of this is: when the headlines start getting worse and worse and worse and worse and worse, we sit back and say, “Exactly what was planned.” And when it starts to accelerate, you go, “Birth pangs.” It’s exactly what Jesus said. When the earthquake hits or the bomb goes off and something terrible happens and some invade—whatever—when it gets to our society and everyone’s saying, “Where’s Christ?” you lean back and say, “I know exactly where Christ is. He’s almost ready to speak the word.” Because that’s how it’s been predicted for us.

Well, on our trip this summer, we did some flying—of course, we weren’t flying the plane; we were passengers on the plane. And as happens on these long flights—you know how it is—it’s just torture, right? And we’re not sitting in first class. We’re back with normal folks in the back. And, you know, it’s cramped and it’s awful. And there’s a baby crying behind. And you know—on these flights—a six-hour flight or five-hour flight—you’re going, “Oh, you know, four and a half hours... oh, four hours... oh, three and three quarters hours... three hours and 40 minutes...” You just are like, “Torture—get me out of here.” And everybody’s upset, and people are falling asleep, right? You know how it is.

Then there’s something that changes everything. You hear this: “We are currently approaching our final descent into Orange County.” Right? The flight attendant: “So bring your seatbacks and tray tables into their upright positions, fasten your seatbelts, the flight attendants will be through the cabin for their finals. If you have any trash...” And then—it’s amazing. Just look around next time that happens on your long flight. Amazing. The guy—the mean guy next to me that didn’t want to talk to us—now, “Yeah, so what do you do for a living? How are you doing?” He’s all nice now. Everybody’s happy. Everybody’s getting up—well, they can’t get up—but they’re lit up now. Oh yes—everything’s great.



Now think about this: the seats don't get any bigger at that moment. The baby has not stopped crying behind me. And now everybody's happy inside. You know, an hour—two hours ago—you're, like, hating life, saying the clock has slowed down. And now all of a sudden—"Oh yeah, where are you going? Oh, you live here? You coming? You're going to this conference?" Everybody's happy now, it seems. Why? Because those words—they remind me that we're almost done.

See, when you hear the bad news, I just want you to hear in your mind this: we began our final descent—not into Orange County—we started our final ascent into the kingdom. Make sure your seatback is in its upright position; your tray tables—your seatbelt is fastened—because we're almost there.

Let me put that in the words of God—the inspired words—and leave you with these words from Psalm 112. It says this: "The righteous [will] never be moved. [The righteous—they're] not afraid of bad news; [with] bad news their heart is firm, because they are trusting in the LORD. [His] heart is steady, and he will not be afraid."

I want you to be sure that the difficulties, the chaos, the immoral things in the world, the terrorist things in the world, the natural evil, the typhoons, the hurricanes, the earthquake—all of that is something that the righteous can look at. And as the Bible says, they're as bold as a lion. And they realize this: never moved, not afraid of bad news, heart is firm, trusting the LORD; heart is steady, not afraid. Why? Because we have the shepherd who's told us that even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, [we will] fear no evil. Why? "You're with me." It seems like you're passive; you're inattentive; you're sleeping in the hold of the ship. Yeah—but your rod and your staff, they comfort me. What does that mean? Your word could change this, and it will change this. "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me"—it will chase me down (that's the verb there). Why? Because I know where I'm headed: "I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Know where you're going, Christian. Don't freak out. Don't be afraid. "The righteous [are] never moved." Why? "Heart is firm"—because he trusts in the LORD.

Let's pray.



God, help us to be less like the disciples in this case—who are crying out the plaintive cry of “I’m dying.” And, God, we want to be less like that, because we don’t want to hear from you the rebuke: “Where is your faith?” We want you to see it. We want it to be clear. And we would rather have a heading on this section in our lives saying, “The Lord leads them into difficult, tumultuous times, and they trust him.” And their hearts are not moved—they’re steady. They don’t fear—they trust the Lord.

And let that be true of us. We know this is a real test of faith—all we’ve got to do is pay attention to what’s going on in the world, and our hearts are easily alarmed. But you’ve told us, “See to it that you’re not alarmed.” These things must take place. God, we hate these difficult, violent, terrible things that do exist in your plan, but we love the big plan. We know you’re doing a good thing. We know what you’re accomplishing is good—that you’re saving a remnant. You’re doing what is righteous and right. So God, we want to trust you in the process. And we want to get excited like the early church, recognizing the imminence of your return, because long flights—they get a lot easier when the destination is imminent. So help us, God, to sense the imminence of the coming kingdom with the increasing difficulties and chaos in this world that we will continue and inevitably have to encounter week in and week out.

Do this for us, that we might please you with our faith—because without faith it is impossible to please you. Do this, God, for your own glory and your own pleasure. In Jesus’ name, Amen.