



**How to be
Strong
in the
Storm**

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As always, if we can help you in any way, please contact the church here at
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(EXCERPT)

As they were walking along the road, a man said to Jesus, "I'll follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no where to lay His head." He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead. But you go and proclaim the Kingdom of God." Still another said, "I will follow you Lord, but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God." (Luke 9:57-62)

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen that died when the Tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell, you no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." (Luke 13:1-5)

Then he told this parable. "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard. And he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man that took care of the vineyard, 'For three

years now, I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.' (Luke 13: 6-9)

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus. And turning to them he said, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my follower. Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:25-33)

Do you remember that big storm we had the other day? We've all been talking about the "tree" analogies and how it was the unbendable trees that didn't survive when the strong winds came. The rigid, the unbendable, and the stiff trees were the ones that were destroyed in the storm. Recently, I was in a situation where a woman was telling some others about some growth she had seen in her life over the years. In the process of talking about this, she shared with everyone a definition of pride which she had found to be very helpful to her in her desire for growth and change. The definition she gave was this: Pride is reserving the right for myself to have the final word or the final decision. Reserving for myself "the right" to make the final decision. That was the definition of pride. And, of course, at least three times the scriptures say, "God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble." God is an enemy of the proud. And if pride is "reserving for myself the right to

make the final decision"—if that's pride—then there's a whole lot of people who think they are friends with God who are, in fact, enemies of God by His definition.

Think about that attitude of being rigid, being proud, being self-centered, and independent and stiff. It is prideful when we live in some compromising sort of life where we make our own decisions, call our own shots, pamper our own flesh, and smile and try to live at the lowest common denominator. "What can I do? How can I act? How can I present myself? What are the things that I could say or participate in that will allow me to "slide by" so that nobody will be able to see anything wrong in me? Or at least if they say anything to me, I'll be able to let it roll off my back. How can I get by with the least amount of self-sacrifice or crucifixion of self-life, or crucifixion of my needs, my rights, or my time, or whatever it happens to be? If we have those attitudes, Jesus said that the storms will come. And when those storms come, if we're not building on the rock of obedience to God, but rather on the sand of getting by, then we will be uprooted and there won't be any fruit. The one year is up, and the thing is cast into the fire.

HIS GRACE

Now, I don't think Jesus was legalistic—what do you think? Does anybody here really believe that Jesus was a legalist? "How dare He say all those things! How incredibly harsh and cruel—'hate your father, mother, brother, sister.' I can't even say goodbye to my family. Come on, Jesus. You're legalistic!" I know a lot of people who would say that every bit of that is legalism. But somehow, because we have relegated scripture to "poetry," we don't even accept the fact that that IS the Jesus that is Lord, that is King, and who's coming back for those who are wearing His colors—period.

We've somehow created this "wax museum Jesus" out there somewhere, where you wind Him up or you pull His string and He says things, but it doesn't mean anything. If anybody said any of those words today, there would be people all over the world screaming, "Legalism, legalism!" But this IS Jesus. This is the only Jesus there

is. And He's not being legalistic. And He is not a hard master. To that man, at that moment, there was no other Hope. Everyone's "one thing you lack" may be different. The "rich young ruler" had a problem with money addictions, apparently, rather than biological family addictions that Jesus said others would have to deal with. God is neither "anti-money," nor "anti-family relationships"—if those issues are totally under His Lordship in all areas of obedience and affection and decision. Jesus is ANTI anything and everything that would cause a person to not instantly obey Him because their heart-strings and prejudices and comforts and pride are tied up in anything less than HIM, in this present fallen age. He is saying that if you don't live this way, then satan will get his hook in you and you will be uprooted. This isn't legalism. This is grace.

"I'm giving you an opportunity. I'm extending My hand to you. I'm bringing Truth into your life that can set you free from the bondage of fear, self-indulgence, the fear of death, the fear of storms, the fear of poverty, the fear of sickness, the fear of loss of loved ones." And if you won't live this way, you will be uprooted. Because satan will find a way to destroy you. If you give him any targets that are uncovered by the grace and the knowledge of God, and a total commitment to Him, and death to self-life ("take up YOUR cross and come after Me" and "deny your very self" and "even unto death")—if you give him any targets, satan will find you out and he will rip you off.

This is not legalism! Jesus is not legalistic as some would quickly call Him if He was physically saying these things to them about areas of their lives they had held back from Him. Jesus is NOT legalistic when He says you must forsake your heart's affections and priorities other than HIM. He just knows how this "wicked and perverted generation" can deceive any man or woman or teen who thinks they can "have their cake, and eat it to." It will, instead, eat THEM. Notice the language of Jesus—not "legalism" but, "I am telling you that I know how this whole thing works! Hear Me! You can't grab for the world and your self life and desires and crutches and comforts, and not be eventually taken to My enemy's home.

This is JESUS saying, "Don't build this tower without counting the cost. Don't go into this thing without knowing that it is going to cost you everything in order to make it all the way through." That's the nature of Christianity. "You can't follow me. You won't be able to continue to follow me without this." That's not legalism. He's saying you won't make it unless this is who you are and want to be. Anyone can sit in a pew, or living room and deceive themselves with pretty prayers and speeches and ideas and potluck dinners. But, a LIFE that isn't fully given to Him, with all of its affections and priorities, all of its time and resources and loves, consumed in HIS Purposes, rather than its own—this person has or will fail. Thus saith the Lord. "This must be the quality of your decision to follow me—that you'll leave it all. You don't have to bury your father, you don't need any excuses to say goodbye to your family. It takes everything to follow me. You leave your nets laying there full of fish, and you go."

He is saying that this has to be your heart and your attitude. It's not legalism, "Do this—or you can't follow me!" It's, "If you won't leave this, if these things still own you in any way, shape, or form—you're trying to live both lives at the same time—then satan will find a way to rip you off." That's the cost. He's looked at the cost of following Him, and He has looked at what will happen if you don't give Him heart, soul, mind and strength. And He is saying, "Watch out! I'm bringing you a knowledge of the unseen world and the way the enemy works. And if you give him a target, he'll find it sooner or later." Jesus is not a legalist in the slightest. He's given us everything that pertains to life and godliness.

HIS KINGDOM, HIS RULES

To repeat Jesus' words does not make you a legalist. To repeat Jesus' words does not make me a legalist. To repeat Jesus' words is to tell it like it is because anything else is deception. What Jesus has not said is deception. Can I go on record as saying that? Everything that Jesus said is True, and anything that does not hold up to the standard that Jesus laid forth is deception. Is it okay for me to say that without getting into a whole lot of trouble? Jesus makes the

rules. This is His Kingdom. Period. There are other kingdoms out there. There are itching ears galore. And there are a great number of teachers who want to tell you something other than what Jesus of Nazareth said. They speak of an alternate kingdom...a parallel universe that has some of the same vocabulary, but it's not Real, there's no substance to it.

And Jesus said that if you try to live in that alternate kingdom—that substitute, counterfeit kingdom that has the vocabulary but everything is a wax museum substitute—if you try to live in that kingdom, the enemy will rip you off. That's a warning from Jesus that it's got to be real in our hearts. There is no half way. We can't try to get by with the lowest common denominator of what we think will keep everybody happy. "Whoa, don't touch me! Okay, I'll do this and I'll do that, and try to keep everybody off the scent." It's not like that. It needs to be from the heart. It has to be from the heart. God knows if I live by faith in the Son of God or if I live by my self-life. God knows the difference, doesn't He? And guess who else does? Satan does, too. Like the seven sons of Sceva. Satan knew the difference between Paul and Jesus, and these other guys who were just using the vocabulary. He knew the difference and he had no fear of someone who used the vocabulary but didn't live by faith in the Son of God.

I want to call us all to the seriousness of a quality of life in the inner man that no one can give to you. Any amount of hiding that you may do from mere humans, like all of us, is really no benefit to you. Maybe you can "slide" by...maybe you can run and hide someplace else. There are all kinds of alternatives. But the truth is, we're all going to stand in front of Jesus. And these are His words, and I want to live this way because He said so! It doesn't make any sense for me to try to rearrange Jesus' words or hide behind some other words Jesus said. He said these too. I believe all the words that He said. And these words are also true and I want to live this way. There isn't some "new covenant" that excludes the teaching of Jesus. Jesus is not an old covenant prophet here. He is the embodiment of the New Covenant. These things are true. They remain

true now and forever more. This is the embodiment of Truth. He is Truth! There is no way to get around this. There's no way to jump over it, and there's no way to create a new covenant where it doesn't apply anymore. Jesus is Truth. There's no way to the Father except by Him and through Him.

WHAT'S THE QUALITY OF YOUR HEART?

If there are still places in your heart that you are trying to slide by on—thinking that it's okay, as long as nobody says anything, and if they do, you'll just kind of slip around until it kind of goes away—if that's your heart, then you're missing something very, very important here. You're missing the fact that Jesus wants you to go all the way with Him. And if you won't live that way, then satan will rip you off—because the storms are coming. Storms are coming that are much larger, much more ferocious, much more fatal, potentially, then anything we've been through so far. And the way satan does stuff...it's always with mirrors where he tricks, deceives, justifies, and accuses others in order to justify self. And you are very susceptible to that if you don't live exactly the way Jesus said to live here and embrace Truth the way Jesus said to embrace it.

If there are any "soft" spots in your heart for anything that you are holding onto, that you are lingering in, that you're justifying yourself in or comparing to others in—then satan will find you out. And the storms will come and they will show what you're worth. And it will always be "somebody else's" fault because satan will make sure that you can feel that way about it. He will send you a great number of teachers to tell you what your itching ears want to hear. And, in fact, Paul said that if you don't love the Truth—if you don't agape the Truth, but you prefer the other stuff—that God Himself will send you a powerful delusion so that you will believe the lie.

God doesn't want any middle ground. If you don't love Truth enough to apply it to your own heart and live a crucified life—if you want an alternative kind of Christianity—then God Himself will send you a powerful delusion so that you will believe the lie (2Thes2). This is supernatural in nature. This is not like geography or chemistry

where there's just a certain set of facts and you either know them or you don't know them. Spiritual Truth isn't like that. If your heart is hard, if your conscience is seared as with a hot iron, if you prefer the lie, if you want some other truth than what Jesus of Nazareth taught... then God will make sure you believe it with all your heart. You won't have to be a hypocrite because God will make sure that you believe the lie. He'll send you a delusion in order that you will believe the lie.

This all goes back to the quality of your heart, not to your intellectual ability to comprehend and to sort, sift, and process. It goes back to the quality of your heart. Do you want to be a *doulos*? Do you want to lay down your life? Are you willing to say, "Let the dead bury their own dead?" Are you willing to hate your mother, brother, sister? Are you willing to leave lands and possessions, and things behind? Are you willing to let go of your rights, or do you have to have the final word? Do you have to reserve for yourself the right to make the final decision? Do you have to have that? Because if you do, then you have "one more year." And I pray that you will use it well.

IT'S UNTO WORSHIP!

"This is not about ME!" And I'm so glad! This is about God, and His power. I just have to choose to lay my life before Him and let Him do His work, and then, "To die is gain." I don't have to live, myself, my "own" life.

This thought is very freeing. It releases us from tons of bondage, and fear and burden that we would have had to carry if this whole thing was about ourselves. I think about John 4 where Jesus, very early in His visible walk on planet earth, spoke about worship. And He said, "My father seeks worshippers." Well that's probably the last time He used that word, to my knowledge, in the rest of his physical life on this planet. He did speak of the stones along the road bursting into praise if His people wouldn't, and a few other things like that. But this is a huge statement, "My Father seeks worshippers." That sounds very global, very comprehensive—as if this

is what it's all about. And worship is, in fact, what it's all about! But then WHY did Jesus spend so much time saying, "Unless you forsake all, you can't be my disciple. Unless you lose your life, you will never find it. Unless you deny your very self, unless you stop reserving for yourself the right to make the final decision and have the final word—unless you stop doing that, you can't be a follower of Mine?! You can't be a Christian. Why did He keep saying stuff like that, if what it was "all about" was worship?

Well the truth is that worship is to "offer your body as a living sacrifice," as Paul concluded for us later on. And that's right after he said to consider the depth, the breath, the majesty of God..."consider His ways that are beyond tracing out"—a very worshipful statement. And then Paul launches right into, "Therefore, in view of God's mercy, offer your body as a living sacrifice. Stop conforming to the patterns of the world." He went and got practical on us again!

The nature of living in a worshipful life that's acceptable to God, "acceptable worship"...the way to be free of the burden that makes worship hypocrisy or wishful thinking, or some theological statement, but not the overflow of a free heart...is that we die to the world and the world to us. We have, in reality, laid those things down before Him and we've given up those things that have an influence on our life. We have stopped worshipping those things. We've stopped worshipping our flesh and our comfort. We've stopped worshipping our safety in storms and our grumbling stomach and hunger. We've stopped worshipping our children and our parents. We've stopped worshipping our education and our need to survive. We've stopped worshipping our need to be right and our need to be intelligent, and our need to be loved. We've stopped worshipping all those things, and now for the first time we're free to worship God.

That's why Jesus said all those things that sounded "legalistic." That wasn't legalism! He was saying, "You've got to let go of these things in order to have my Father." You can't have both at the same time. "I'll have no other gods before Me." "I'm a jealous God." He is after

a heart that belongs to Him and is sold out to Him, and is not clinging on to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, wanting to be like God, demanding our rights, privileges, space, opinions, and pampered flesh. God is after our willingness to lay all of that down and to trust Him, naked and unashamed before the Father. In need of nothing—truly in need of nothing except His fellowship and His friendship. Drawn by that and continually abandoned into that, controlled ultimately in every aspect of our lives simply by the fellowship of the Father. That's what worship is about.

And the reason why Jesus said all those hard sounding things is because they are very related to true worship. In fact, the only way to have true worship is to have one God. "The Lord Thy God is One God." "And thou shall love the Lord Thy God with all of thy heart, all of thy soul, strength, and mind." And that's the only way, O Israel, that you can truly see the One God and love Him. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." "Without holiness, no one will see the Lord." That's a very absolute statement. It just doesn't get any more absolute than that. Without a set apartness, without a called apart life, unto the Father, away from the junk—you'll not see the Lord. You can't see Him. You can't see the Kingdom, and you'll not be able to see God and experience His presence in your life the way He intended.

DON'T SQUIRM—IT'S A GOOD THING!

"My Father seeks worshippers." And now I'm going to spend the rest of my life, Jesus said, showing you how to be free from the things that you have been worshipping so that you might experience His love and abandonment into His arms. This is a good thing, not a bad thing. It's a privilege; it's a "get to," not a "have to." It's an opportunity that the face of the earth had never seen before because they were sold out to their own flesh. They were slaves to their flesh and they were slaves to the penalty of being slaves to their flesh—the bondage of sin and the penalty of sin. And they were without hope in the world, Paul said. But then God, rich in mercy, opened the way where we can be set free from the flesh. Jesus said to the Pharisees, "You have made no room in your heart

for me." He, again, spent his three years of visible life saying, "I want to show you that it's worth it to be free, and that you can be free, because I'm going to live it out right in front of you. And that's what He has called us to do and given us opportunity to do, and given us the privilege and the equipment to be able to do.

But there are some decisions on our part. He didn't spend all that time teaching for no reason. He could have walked around with a magic wand—right? "Okay, you're free. You're free. You're free." He spent all that time teaching because we were made in God's likeness, given the opportunity to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We were given the opportunity to grow in understanding. Paul's prayers were continually that the Father would grant understanding, that the Father would grant revelation, SO THAT we could live a life that is worthy of Him. Worthy of the calling that brings pleasure to the Father, and an inheritance to Jesus.

He brings us understanding because we're made in His image of free moral agency. He brings us understanding that we can see things the way He does and then willingly abandon ourselves into His arms, leaving behind the cares and the worries of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches—loving the world, loving ourselves, and demanding the right to have the final decision. He gives us the opportunity and paves the way for us with His grace and His kindness to know Him, experience Him, and to live in fellowship with Him, uncontrolled by the other junk. That's how those things are reconciled. It's an opportunity He presents to us, and He shows us the obstacles and the weeds that we can willingly—of our own free will—root up.

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord Thy God is One God. One God." Therefore, love Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Worship Him. We are set apart to worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. If the Spirit of God is quenched within you, then all you can do is mouth the words and get yourself an emotional high. If it isn't based on Truth, then it's a deception. So to worship Him in Spirit

and in Truth means to live the life that Jesus lived. As the Apostle John said sixty years later, “Anyone that claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus walked.” That’s the opportunity He has put in front of us. I want us to experience that together.

Our Father, we pray that You will help us. With great gratitude in our hearts, we acknowledge the favor You have shown us. We were dead in our transgressions and sins, without hope in the world. Ignorant, blind mockers living in unbelief and rebellion...that’s all any of us were. All we had to offer was foolishness. And yet, You touched our hearts and softened us apart from our own ability, apart from our own willpower, apart from the convincing or persuasion of mere humans around us. You, Yourself, extended Your hand into our hearts and touched us and softened us and turned our hard hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, giving us the opportunity to see You and to know You.

Now we want to go beyond just simply experiencing Your salvation. We want to go into a realm of being worshippers of You, loving You and being set apart for Your purposes and set apart for Your pleasure. Help us to see how to go about all of that. Father, we’re not bound by any law. We’re not bound by any external judgment. We’re not bound by the opinions of men or by a system of law. We’re bound by a covenant of love and a desire to return to You the love that You first showed us in waking us in the first place. While we were dead in our transgressions and sins, You loved us and gave Yourself for us. And greater love has no man than to lay down his life for his friend. While You did that for us, we want to do that for You and for each other. We want to lay down our very life and every demand we have on that life, and put it in your hands where it can be kept for safekeeping, for sure, until that final hour. Amen.