

Talks On Miracles - 4. Jesus calming the storm.

Whilst we do not under-estimate the impact which any of the Lord's miracles had on people, those which seem to have caused the greatest sense of awe and wonder were those which demonstrated the Lord's control over nature and the elements. Amongst these, and probably as well known as any, was the occasion when He stilled a storm; a miracle which is spoken of in each of the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, and which took place at night on the Sea of Galilee.

The Lord had spent the day in Capernaum, a fishing village on the north-west coast of the Sea of Galilee, teaching the people and healing the sick who were brought to Him. As evening approached, and worn out with it all, "He said to his disciples, 'Let us go over to the other side.'" He seems simply to have wanted rest, "and when He entered into a boat, His disciples followed Him." Clearly, their intention was to sail over to the near-deserted eastern shore where there would be peace and quiet and in order, temporarily, to get away from it all.

As however can happen on the Sea of Galilee, "A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke Him, saying, "Lord, save us, we're going to drown!" He replied, "You of little faith! Why are you so afraid?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm." Over-awed by what had happened the disciples marveled, saying, "Who is this? Even the winds and the sea obey Him!" They had so far seen the Lord do many remarkable things, but this was the first time they had seen Him demonstrate His power to control the forces of nature. Their questioning amongst themselves suggests, in fact, a reappraisal of what they had previously thought about Him. What was more than obvious now was that the Lord was no ordinary miracle worker after all. The powers He possessed were the powers of God Himself.

As with the other miracles previously spoken of in this present series of talks, our principal concern lies with the way in which it touches upon the lives of people today. What is both important and fascinating about all of these stories is the deeper, spiritual meaning which they contain, and the fact that they have been used by the Lord to teach and to instruct us about situations in life which concern us all.

In this regard the storm on the Sea of Galilee is a picture to us of the experience of temptation. The wind whipping up the waves represents influences from hell which awaken and stir up evil thoughts and feelings within us; thoughts and feelings which, as we know only too well, at times threaten to swamp and overwhelm us. Against them, and of ourselves, we are powerless. We try to proceed. We try to not let them get the better of us. But we cannot succeed. They are simply too powerful. And we would sink under them if it were not for the Lord.

Briefly, then, this is what is spoken of here. The story speaks to us of man's inadequacy and helplessness in the face of evil promptings and false ideas which come to him, and how it is that it is only from the Lord that we are able to overcome them. Where the Lord is not present, of course; where His teaching is not listened to; where His strength is not called upon; it cannot but be that a person will go under. Conversely, where He is present; where there is a looking to Him and a calling upon Him to come to our aid; we are able to ride out these storms and to come through the night to a better day.

Man being buffeted about by evil and falsity. This, let it be said again, is what is spoken of here. But let us look more closely at some of the things said; some of the details of the story which, when rightly understood, help us to understand and to appreciate more of what is involved in temptation conflict.

We noted earlier how it was that the Lord and the disciples were, at the time, crossing the Sea of Galilee from the west coast to the east: from the Holy Land proper, in point of fact, to the region outside and around it. And what is depicted or represented by this is the effort we should all be making to bring our religion down into everyday life. The Holy Land, as such, represents the internal man within every one of us; the realm of thought and ideas, in other words, where we first receive the Lord by reading, thinking, and learning about Him. But it is not enough to confine our religion within the limits of its borders, or to keep it at that level. We have to go, as it were, "to the other side", and take our religion out into all our actions and behaviour.

The first stirrings of religion with everyone cannot but be within. Initially it has to be a matter of learning and believing. But what we learn and believe must be carried out into life. And this is when trouble and opposition enters in. So long as our religion is only thought about there is no real problem.

So long as we are always intending to reform and promising ourselves that we will make a greater effort later if the hells leave us be. Once, however, we do begin to reform, to apply our religion to life, to go over to 'the other side', from theory to practice, then it becomes a different story. It is when a person genuinely resolves to live according to the truths he knows, that influences from hell try to whip up his evils and falsities to prevent him from successfully doing so. Determine, as one may do, for example, to be more generous in one's attitudes and feelings towards others, we can be certain that influences will be at work stirring up opposition within us such as to bring about conflict and temptation. It is always the way.

Temptation is remarkable in that when we feel we need the Lord most of all He apparently doesn't care and isn't there. We can be in the midst of real inner conflict, feeling as if we must be overcome, and yet the Lord doesn't come to our aid. To all appearances He is blissfully unmindful of the situation in which we find ourselves. We can be struggling with unhappy thoughts about life and about people, and on the surface there is no evidence that the Lord is either interested or concerned. He seems to be asleep, so to speak, in the rear part of the ship.

Though that may indeed be the appearance, it is not the reality. The Lord doesn't show His hand, this is true, or prematurely rush to our aid. He knows it is best for us to have to cope as well as we can for as long as we can. Here is what develops strength of character and a sense of spiritual responsibility. And the Lord knows this. It is good for us to try to row our boats as best we can against the evils and falsities which are stirred up in opposition against us. It is important that we make as much effort on our own as we possibly can. The Lord intentionally holds back because He knows it is best for us to try to handle the situation. He will not rescue us from a situation of temptation earlier than is needed, for it is important for us to have the experience of trying to overcome it. And we have only to stop and think for a moment to realise how wise the Lord is in this regard.

The Lord never sleeps, but at times it appears as if He does so. He appears to be absent and uncaring but, in reality, and as Swedenborg wrote, "the absence of God from a man is no more possible than the absence from the earth, of the sun with its heat and light. (*True Christian Religion* 70). If it is in our best interests, however, to undergo temptation, to be tried and to be tested, He will allow the temptation to proceed and remain, as it were, in the background.

And yet, when out of a sense of desperateness and feeling of helplessness, we do call upon Him He will not let us down or allow us to be overwhelmed. Here again from the work *True Christian Religion*, "In temptations man is apparently left to himself, although God is then most present in his inmosts, and supports him; and therefore when anyone overcomes in temptation, he is inmostly conjoined with God." (para. 126).

After every temptation which is successfully endured; after every evil which has been successfully overcome - not from our own strength, of course, but from the Lord's - there descends upon the life of the person concerned a sense of well-being and tranquility; of peace and calm. It is, we are told, as when a storm has finished, as when the clouds have gone and the sun is shining again. This, it is to be noted, is what is meant by the "great calm".

"Then, He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm."

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