

The God Who Sleeps

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Date: 26 July 2015

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[0 : 0 0] Alright, we'll keep your Bible open there for a few minutes. We're going to have a look at this passage. We're doing a series right now if you haven't been around, if you've been on holiday or if you're a visitor, on the miracles of Christ and the gospel narratives.

And Derek, the first week, looked at the resurrection of the Son of God. That's the greatest miracle of overcoming death. And then Tom last week looked at a miracle of overcoming disease, of overcoming leprosy.

And this week we're looking at a miracle of overcoming disaster. So we've got death, disease, and disaster now that we've looked at in terms of the miracles.

The question I want to ask real quick before we look at this text is why the miracles and the gospel narratives? Why are they there and what are they doing?

This is not a case in the gospels of magic tricks, of Jesus doing what would have been common in the first century and that's magic. This is not Jesus turning to Peter and saying, hold my drink and watch this.

[1 : 1 1] It's not him performing bells and whistles and tricks. Actually if you look at the miracles throughout the whole of the gospels, there's never instances of things like alchemy, which is alchemy turning something into something else completely outside the bounds of its molecular structure or something like that.

You don't have Jesus taking stones and making diamonds. You don't have stuff like that. What you actually have, if you think about it for a second, is Jesus taking things and putting them the way they ought to be.

So he takes dead people and makes them alive again. In other words, he takes somebody from a state of death and makes them healthy the way things ought to be or he takes bread and makes more bread because people are hungry and people ought not be hungry.

He takes fish and he makes more fish. He takes water and makes wine because you don't want to kill a good wedding party.

He does things the way they ought to be done with the miracles. We have the same thing happening in our text today. What's happening in the miracle narratives, the point is they're not episodes of magic by which Jesus is saying, look at what I can do.

[2 : 3 5] Although we do say that when we see them, they're Jesus bringing a message of restoration and saying this is the way things ought to be.

This is what the kingdom of God looks like. The kingdom of God is a place where there is no more death, disease, and disaster.

There's no more hungry people. It's not magic tricks. It's Jesus saying the coming of the kingdom looks like this, a kingdom without misery.

What's happening in the miracle narratives is Jesus is giving us a glimpse of a restored kingdom, a glimpse of a place where the king lives with his people in such a way that there is no more pain and sorrow and misery.

That's what's going on. Within that we see something about who Jesus is. We see Jesus as something different.

[3 : 40] We'll see that here in the text. In other words, the miracles we could say in just one little phrase are great reversals. Great reversals.

If you're familiar with J.R. Tolkien, the author of the Lord of the Rings series, which I'm sure most of you know about, he wrote this fantastic essay in, I think it was in the 50s or 60s, I think it's called On Fairy Stories.

In this he coins a new literary device. He coins a term for it, a device that he sees across all literature in every great story and he calls it a eukatastrophe.

You can hear one of the words you know in that phrase, catastrophe, a terrible disaster. The you at the front, E.U., is from the Greek word for happiness.

It's like a terrible disaster of happiness. In other words, a great reversal, a surprising catastrophic event that causes a reversal, not towards misery, but towards happiness.

[4 : 46] He says that this is the formula for every great story. Listen to what he says. I coined the word eukatastrophe, the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears, which I argue is the highest function of all stories to produce.

And I was there led to the view that it produces a peculiar effect because it's a sudden glimpse of the truth. Sudden glimpse of the truth.

Your whole nature suddenly feels as if a major limb has been popped back into joint. This great reversal, this eukatastrophe, by it we perceive that this is indeed how things really do work in the world for which our nature was made for.

And I concluded this by saying that the resurrection is the greatest eukatastrophe possible in the greatest true story ever.

And it produces an essential emotion, Christian joy, which is so much like sorrow because it's a movement from joy to from sorrow to joy.

[6 : 00] You see what Tolkien's saying is that in every great story you have a mimic, a copy of the greatest eukatastrophe of all time and that's the resurrection of the Son of God, the great reversal from death to life.

And in the miracle narratives what we have are eukatastrophes, great reversals from death, disease, hunger, disaster into life, into kingdom life, small glimpses of what it is to participate in Christ's resurrection life.

This is the kingdom of God. This is where it's headed. This is what's coming in the new creation. Okay, so now for a few minutes we're going to look at specifically what's happening in this passage.

And I want to do that by looking at three nouns in the passage, three objects. Okay, first we'll look at the stormy sea, then we'll look at Jesus, and then we'll look at the disciples.

Okay, so first the stormy sea. The context of this passage is that Jesus has been preaching in Capernaum, which is north of Jerusalem on the west side of the Jordan River in the Sea of Galilee, and look, he's tired.

[7 : 16] We see that in Luke especially. The three of the Gospels give us an account of this. He's just preached the sermon on the mount. He's performed some miracles in Capernaum, and he says in Luke, let's get in the boat because the crowds are pressing in, right?

And so he gets in the boat and they're going to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee to find rest, okay? So that's the context. It's north of Judea, north of Jerusalem, and the first point of information we get is that the boat is being swamped by a tempest, by a storm on the sea.

Luke gives us a bit more that the boat is filling up with water, so they're concerned that they're just going to drown. It's going to sink. The Sea of Galilee is quite large. This is not some tiny little lake that you could swim to the shore.

Who knows how far out they are, but there's a serious concern here, okay? Now the Sea, it's not insignificant that this miracle, this first nature miracle that Jesus performs is on the sea in a storm, okay?

All of the nations of the ancient Near East, and the times of the Old Testament, as well as the Greek and the Roman cities, the nations of this time of the first century, would have seen the sea as a God, okay?

[8 : 42] It would have been deified. They would have looked at the sea as a type of God. The sea for ancient peoples was a place of absolute chaos, okay?

A lot of commentators about Genesis, when you're looking at the creation account, will say that when Moses is writing down the creation account, he's giving us something of an argument against the gods of the other nations there.

One of them is the God of the sea of different nations. So you see in the very first part of Genesis 1, the spirit is hovering over the face of the water.

And then God divides the waters and tells the water, stay in your place, right? And so you get this image there of it saying the God of Abraham, Isaac, and the Jacob, the true God of the Old Testament, the God of Jesus Christ, the Triune God.

He is the God not from the sea, but who controls the sea. You see? He holds back the chaos that all the other nations are afraid of.

[9 : 50] You worship the sea, our God makes it his servant, okay? So we get that kind of a thing throughout the Old Testament. Just listen to a couple of the passages in the Psalms, Psalm 89.

You still the majesty of the seas. Now that term majesty there could be taken in a number of ways, but it could say something like this. You still the lower case G, God of the seas, right?

You have power over this false God that other people worship. You calm the seas, or Psalm 18. He made darkness his covering.

This is God. His canopy around him. The dark rain stormy clouds of the sky were his canopy. Out of the brightness of his presence, clouds advanced with hell stones and bolts of lightning.

The Lord thunders from heaven. The voice of the most high resounds. Okay? So what we get here in these Psalms is a two-fold picture. One is that he is the God over the sea, over the storm, but he's also the God who makes his presence known in the storm.

[11 : 02] Okay? Think about other episodes in the Old Testament. The crossing of the Red Sea is one of the great stories of water in the Old Testament, right?

The Israelites must go through the sea to get to salvation. The Red Sea is an episode of salvation for Israel and judgment for Egypt.

So at that point, you get this theme throughout the whole Old Testament that at the location of the sea is both salvation and death.

It is salvation for some who have a mediator, Moses, to separate the waters, to divide the chaos.

For those who don't, it's death and it's judgment, right? So we've got this two-fold aspect of the sea working there throughout the whole of the Scriptures.

[12 : 04] Okay? So, the storms and the seas are God's creatures. They are His servants and they also are a place, a location where He makes known both salvation and judgment.

Baptism, okay? Baptism. It's going underneath the water so that you may come out again. It's going underneath the water as a symbol of judgment so that you may come out of the water in new life, okay?

In fact, Peter calls the crucifixion the baptism of Christ. He was baptized at the cross by fire.

He went underneath the waters so that He might come up again. It's the location of both judgment and salvation, all right? Now look, really, we treat the waters the same way today, okay?

I know none of us walk around thinking of the waters as a deity and you should not, rightly. But even in modern intellectual humanity, especially non-religious people, talk about water like this, okay?

[13 : 19] They talk about ecology and the environment in terms that sound like it's a God, okay? If you don't believe me, just go read the Huffington Post environment section, all right?

And you'll get plenty of stuff on how Mother Nature rules the world. I mean, you get this all the time from non-religious speech. It's a Mother Nature type of a thing where the seas and the storms and all these things, no matter how advanced we get, no matter what we do, will always be our enemies, okay?

In other words, every single person, whether they worship the true God or some other God, rules the weight of what disaster means. And disaster means this, that we are absolutely helpless.

There's nowhere that you don't feel more helpless than in the face of a storm. Now look, Scotland has almost no storms. You get snow and stuff like that, but you don't have storms where people are dying in mass numbers, which is wonderful.

It's great to live here. I used to live in the Southern U.S. and we would get multiple tornadoes and hurricanes every year, and I can list off people I've known who have died in them.

[14 : 36] And it's just a phenomenon that doesn't happen very often here, which is excellent. But the point is this, that if you've ever been in that world, in that environment, I've been there a few times where I've been actually there in the heart of a tornado or the heart of a hurricane, you come out afterwards and you look out and you see these huge plots of land literally stripped.

Okay? When a tornado comes, you can literally come out and find its exact path because there will literally be up to a mile wide, maybe less, lane of just total decimation.

Outside of it, there may be houses standing beautifully perfect and pristine. Outside of that lane, there will be nothing but disaster. Okay? I have a graphic for you actually.

See if these guys have it really briefly. Yay. Perfect. This just to show you how our technology has not gotten us beyond this problem is a graphic of all the storms that in the last seven, I think it's seven years have killed at least 25 people.

Okay? Look, we're not going to fix this through technology. Okay? In the face of storm, we feel absolutely helpless. But look, what this passage is pointing us to is it, and you can turn that off now.

[16 : 09] It's not just about storms at sea. When we face things like this, what our heart cries out is it's not supposed to be this way.

When you're in the midst of elementary school in sixth grade, I'm telling a story of myself and a tornado hits the school and the glass shatters all around you and cuts your arms and legs and knees and you feel the building shaking, you think to yourself, I'm not supposed to die like this.

I'm not supposed to be helpless. It's not supposed to be this way. But look, she's not supposed to die either. And he's not supposed to die.

And kids aren't supposed to get cancer. And Planned Parenthood isn't supposed to kill babies and sell their body parts.

It's not supposed to be this way. It's supposed to be this way. And all of this, he's asleep.

[17 : 15] You see, feel the weight of the disciples' dilemma. It's not supposed to be like this. And he's asleep.

Don't read this as a childhood Sunday school story. Write yourself there and realize that they're in the middle of the sea. The waves are coming over the boat and they're saying, I'm not supposed to die like this.

What are you doing, you sleeper? Wake up. Are you lazy? Do you not see what's happening here?

Two things that we can learn from what Jesus does here about Jesus in this passage. What did Jesus' actions tell us about him in this passage? Jesus' actions tell you something about how to respond in hope to these events.

First of all, he's asleep. He's tired, you see. He left on the boat because he was tired.

[18 : 22] He had to go to sleep. He needed his rest. He's been teaching all day on the side of a mountain. He climbed up it. He has to climb back down it.

His legs are tired. He needs rest. He's tired like you get tired. He's like you in every way because he has been tempted and felt pain and weakness in every way as you have, except without sin.

He's a man. He knows what it is to feel your helplessness in the face of storms.

The second thing he does though is that he turns towards the sea and he says, peace, be still. He rebukes it.

He's the God of Psalm 68. He is the God of the storm. He's the God who delivered the Israelites across the Red Sea. He's Yahweh.

[19 : 31] He is the God-man. Every single time you see something like this happening in the Gospels, how do people respond?

They are afraid of him, you see. One of the most interesting things about this text is that it's no longer the storm that they fear at the end. It's Jesus.

They're not afraid of dying from the storm anymore. It's that they look at him and say, who is this? I'm afraid of this man, right?

Because he is the God who comes in the terrible majesty of storm and cloud from the Old Testament. He is the God who in Isaiah 6, Isaiah bowed before and said, woe is me.

I have seen you, right? He is the God who in the Old Testament, if you were to see his face, you would just die. That's why throughout the Gospel narratives, all the people that come into contact with him, for instance, my favorite is in the Garden of Gethsemane, and they're about to arrest him.

[20 : 38] The soldiers who are going to arrest him fall on their faces before him in worship. They came to arrest him, to kill him, and they can't help but first fall before him in worship.

This is the God man. The God of the Old Testament has become incarnate. Look, this is the God who fills and knows what it is to be helpless like you, but was never really helpless.

This is the God who stills the chaos of death, disaster, and disease by engulfing himself in the chaos of God's wrath on the cross.

He knows what it is to be like you. For those of you today who might be doubting, who struggle with doubt, who are skeptics, dismissing the miracle narratives on the conviction of being a modern intellectual is really nothing more than a convenience of replacing one faith for another faith.

What we see about people from our own experience and from the Bible is this. Look, you're not just a brain on a stick.

[22 : 00] You're not just walking around as matter in motion. You're not just the result of some mere materialistic process. You've got emotional and volitional needs.

You're a sufferer and a dreamer and a person who has hopes in something, and all of those things and things that you cannot see and have never seen before. Every single person does that.

It's just a question of what is it that you put your faith in that you've never seen before? It's something. It's some dream, some hope, some vision that's going to satisfy your needs.

Your heart is restless. That's who we are as people. We're restless. What Jesus has come to say in this passage to us today is that you will not find rest.

Your needs will not be satisfied, not just intellectually, but emotionally and volitionally as a sufferer, as a person who needs to hope in something.

[22 : 57] You won't find it until you turn to this man. It is only here in the God who became man that you truly have one single shred of hope in this world to know that there is somebody out there who knows what it feels like to see children die from cancer and who also put himself in that place, but at the same time wasn't helpless like any of them or any of us.

Where are you putting your hope? This is the only location. Jesus is telling us here that he is about the business of killing the storms in life before which we stand helpless.

Look, at his resurrection they were pronounced dead and dying, dead and dying. What he's calling us to do is to participate in this resurrection life.

Participate in this resurrection life by hope. Now lastly, thirdly and finally, the disciples. When we come to the disciples, what we come to is this, but I don't feel like that.

You say that by the resurrection death, disease and disaster are dead and dying, but I'm still going through it.

[24 : 22] What does Christ teach us here through the disciples about that? It's striking here that what he says to them, they're afraid and he says, you have little faith.

Why are you afraid? Now, look, I probably should have brought this up earlier, but this passage is extremely similar to the Jonah narrative.

If you know the Jonah narrative very well, just listen for a second to the similarities in the short passage from Jonah. But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea and there was a mighty tempest on the sea so that the ship threatened to break up.

The mariners were afraid and each cried out to his God and they hurled the cargo overboard that so that to lighten the ship so that they might not drown.

But Jonah, remember what Jonah did? Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had laid down and was fast asleep.

[25 : 26] So the captain came and said to him, what do you mean, oh sleeper? Wake up and call out to your God so that we might not perish. Look, one of the things that we get here is that Jesus is the new Jonah, okay?

Except in this case, Jesus says, peace be still to the sea. In this instance, if you remember, Jonah had to be thrown overboard to save the mariners, to save the ship.

Christ wasn't thrown overboard here. He pronounced himself to be God by telling the sea to calm down. Look, Christ was thrown overboard and swallowed by the well of death at the cross.

He calls himself the new Jonah in the New Testament. He is the Jonah. He is the one who came and put himself under the sea, under the water, swallowed up by the well of death.

In order that coming out again by his resurrection life, you might have a glimmer of hope. Now look, we take that message and we think about what he says to the disciples here.

[26 : 36] This is what he says. He says, you of little faith. Now look, we're tempted when we read that to say these guys don't know who's in front of them.

They don't have any faith. What's wrong with you, right? But notice what he says. He doesn't say you don't have any faith. He says you only have a little bit of faith.

Look, it's not that they don't have faith. It's that they don't have very much of it. In the face of suffering, it's usually the case that you don't have very much faith.

But the point is this, it's not the quality of your faith. It's the object of your faith that saves you. You see, it doesn't matter how weak your faith is.

Look at what they did, they still went to Jesus, the King of the Kingdom. It's Jesus that they woke up, right? If it was the fact that they had no faith, then they wouldn't have turned to Him in the first place.

[27 : 41] It's not the quality, but the object. It's Jesus Himself that is the goal. It's not your faith. Your faith does nothing. Your faith is a gift.

It's Christ as the object of faith by which you have hope. And so in this, what we have to come back to the beginning is a double eukatastrophe.

The obvious eukatastrophe is this, that when you're about to die on the sea, Jesus says, peace be still, that's the obvious one, but the not so obvious eukatastrophe in this text is this, that whenever your faith was completely insufficient and unworthy, God saved you anyway.

That's a great reversal. Your faith is inadequate, but peace be still, because it doesn't matter what you do.

It's about what I'm doing at the cross and at the resurrection. Look, any other religion could not preach this message. I'm struck seeing a Seraj right here.

[28 : 53] It reminds me that when Seraj wrote that piece, if you saw it for Desiring God, one of the things he says about his conversion story, and I think I'm saying this correctly, but he can tell me afterwards if I'm wrong, that in Hinduism, he was struck by the fact that Krishna, one of the great gods of Hinduism, is so unlike Jesus, because Krishna, when you mess up, just punishes you.

But when you have weak, insufficient, and unworthy faith in Christianity, Jesus just says, well, it's about me, peace be still.

There's no other religion like it, you see. And we'll close with this, just a short illustration. In C.S. Lewis's, one of his science fiction books called Paralandra, fantastic science fiction trilogy, if you haven't read it, the main character, Ransom, finds himself in a cavern at the end of the book.

And he's gotten into this cavern through a storm. And it was one of those caverns, actually, where he was plunged underneath the water during a storm. And he came out inside the cavern, and it was absolute darkness, and he woke up there, pitch black, he waits hours and hours and hours and hours, waiting for light to come up, for morning, and it never comes.

And he realized that he's probably been there like two days, just waiting, pitch black. And so what he starts to do is he starts to grope, to find the wall, to find something, absolute and utter darkness.

[30 : 30] And the way Lewis describes it, as he says this, he longed for light, like he longs for food while he's starving in the desert.

He looked at light like it was a drink of water in the middle of the desert. And at the end of the text, he all of a sudden sees this little photon, ray, he doesn't know how far, thousands of feet away, off in the distance.

And he starts voraciously climbing a cliff in utter darkness to get to it. And he sits there, as he's writing it later, and ponders, why would a human be so stupid as to climb a cliff in utter darkness when you have no ability to see your footholds or handholds or any of that, that you're probably just going to fall and go towards your death?

And he says that the only reason he does it is because he was starving for light in such a way that darkness had become his prison, that he could feel the blackness around him inside his body like the soot and the grime that he actually was.

You see? The point is this, that when ransom, the main character, sees this little photon of light, he has to climb to it for this one glimmer of light of hope in the middle of absolute darkness.

[32 : 01] Is there any hope he rushes to climb to it? Here's the difference that Lewis is trying to draw out, that he draws that later into the book. When you're in the midst of absolute blackness and the absolute darkness of life, the gray, dark soot is both outside and within your whole body, and you don't see a single, single photon of light, you don't have to do what ransom did.

You don't have to climb to it. That's the message of the Gospel. The light of the nations has descended to you like a light that fills the entire room with just a single, small beam.

Your hope is the light to which death, disease, disaster. Take a knee before Jesus and repent before him and say, woe is me, I am sorry for existing.

That is what these forces do before him. By what little faith you are holding on to in the midst of Monday mornings, and death, and disease, and hard marriages, and disasters, and hunger, and the news channel, by what little faith you have, your hope is that his light will not be kept under a basket.

He's coming. Hope is there. He will make a world without death, disease, disaster. Let's pray.

[33 : 35] Our Lord and God, we ask, Father, that you would make us people who hope in nothing else, but Jesus Christ and what he's come to do. We ask for this in Jesus' name.

Amen.