

[February 26, 2017].

### Rain, Gales & Lightning – Oh My!

Alexander Hamilton, one of the high-energy fathers of this nation, was born and raised on a small Caribbean island, an illegitimate child maternally orphaned at a young age. In those days of no television, radio, internet or other quick ways of communication, often fame resulted from your writings. Hamilton was just such.

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Several months ago, Shirl and Bekah returned from one of their jaunts to New York City with the book *Alexander Hamilton* by Ron Chernow in tow. This #1 New York Times bestseller provides great light not only on the man Alexander Hamilton, a Trump-like character who was congenitally unable to walk away from a fight, but also on many of the other founders of this nation and the establishing of this country. Without getting into laborious detail, suffice to say those men of that era added a whole new meaning to the phrase “basest of men.”

I thoroughly enjoyed reading Chernow’s *Alexander Hamilton*, but there were two portions in particular that caught my attention and that I felt compelled to share with you. To do so, I thought perhaps I could build a sermon around those two passages, bookends style, so here we go.

On the night of August 31, 1772 a massive hurricane tore through St. Croix, carving a wide swath of destruction. The *Royal Danish American Gazette*, for whom Hamilton was already writing occasional pieces, described that hurricane as the “most dreadful hurricane known in the memory of man.” Hamilton took up pen:

*Where now, oh! Vile worm, is all thy boasted fortitude and resolution? What is become of thine arrogance and self sufficiency? . . . Death comes rushing on in triumph, veiled in a mantle of tenfold darkness. His unrelenting scythe, pointed and ready for the stroke . . . . See thy wretched helpless state and learn to know thyself . . . . Despise thyself and adore thy God . . . . O ye who revel in affluence see the afflictions of humanity and bestow your superfluity to ease them . . . . Succour the miserable and lay up a treasure in heaven. [Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, p. 37]*

Now, in this day and age, such writing would almost surely get you branded a hate-monger and would likely end your career. That Hamilton was launched into world-wide fame with this powerful writing shows the condition of things in those days some 250 years ago vis-à-vis nowadays. Here are some additional details:

*Hamilton did not know it, but he had just written his way out of poverty. This natural calamity was to prove his salvation. His hurricane letter generated such a*

*sensation – even the island’s governor inquired after the young author’s identity – that a subscription fund was taken up by local businessmen to send this promising youth to North America to be educated. [Id.]*

As I pondered this Hamilton writing, it hit me to talk about the Lord and his workings through the weather. We often do this when some powerful weather event rains judgment down on this generation (floods, tornados, etc.), but let’s consider a different paradigm, first from Matthew Chapter 8:

**23 And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.**

**24 And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.**

**25 And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.**

**26 And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.**

**27 But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!**

And then this version from Mark Chapter 4:

**37 And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.**

**38 And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?**

**39 And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.**

**40 And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?**

**41 And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?**

*1. Following Christ will not prevent your having earthly sorrows and troubles.*

Here in this story are the chosen disciples of the Lord Jesus in great anxiety and fear. This faithful little flock which believed when all other so-called religionists were unbelieving, is allowed by the Shepherd to be much disquieted. The fear of death breaks in upon them like an armed man. The deep water seems likely to go over their souls at any moment. These early pillars of the soon-to-be planted church are much distressed.

Perhaps they had not reckoned on all this. Perhaps they had expected that Christ's service would lift them above the reach of most earthly trials. Have any of you ever had those thoughts? I confess I have. Perhaps they believed that He who could raise the dead, heal the sick, feed multitudes with a few loaves and cast out devils with a word would never allow his servants to be sufferers upon earth. Maybe they thought their journeys would always be smooth featuring freedom from trouble and care.

If these disciples so thought, they were mistaken. If any of us so think, we are mistaken. This is a glorious path we are on, far superior to mundane and typical lives, yet we must go through many an anxiety and endure many a pain.

It is good and fitting that we understand that Christ's service never did secure a man from all the ills that flesh is heir to, and never will. If you are a believer, you must reckon on having your share of sickness and pain, sorrow and tears, losses and crosses, deaths and bereavements, partings and separations, vexations and disappointments – so long as you are in this human body. Christ has undertaken that all who come to him shall have all things pertaining to life and godliness. But that doesn't mean "no trouble" is our lot.

To the contrary, trouble is often the only fire which will burn away the dross that clings to our hearts. Heartache and distress is the pruning-knife which the great Husbandman employs in order to make us fruitful in good works. The harvest of the Lord's field is seldom ripened by sunshine only; it must go through its days of wind and rain and storm as well.

And I think we can expect those troubles will be comparable to those that befall the non-chosen. For example: In our story, we read of a **great storm of wind**. (Mark 4:37). In Ezekiel chapter 13, God speaks of sending a **stormy wind** in his **fury** against the foolish prophets. (Ezekiel 13:13). The difference? The Lord's people come through the storms to calm; those in Ezekiel the very foundations are destroyed. Forgive the pun, but the children of God "weather" the afflictions better.

## ***2. The Lord Jesus Christ is truly and really man.***

In this historical tale, we see this truth in a striking way. Specifically, we read that Jesus was **asleep on a pillow**. (Mark 4:38). He was weary, tired and fatigued after a long day of open-air preaching to the multitudes. The great Confederate hero general, Stonewall Jackson, had many glorious victories. He was credited with having the best military mind in the country and was a brilliant strategist on the battlefield. General Robert E. Lee called Jackson his "right arm." But virtually all of Jackson's biographers agree his defeats – and there were many – almost always were due primarily to his absolute exhaustion, to the point that he would literally fall asleep with food in his mouth while trying to eat.

Settle deeply in your mind that Jesus Christ was indeed man. Exhaustion, weariness and fatigue are features of the flesh. Christ took part of flesh and blood, and was made like unto us in all things, sin only excepted. He had a body like our own. Like us, he was born of a woman. Like us, he grew and increased in stature over a lifetime. Like us, he was often hungry and thirsty, and faint and weary. Like us, he ate and drank, rested and slept. And like us, he sorrowed and wept and felt. This is an amazing miracle of condescension, grace, pity, empathy and love.

I thus tell you that there is a mine of comfort here; i.e. that Jesus was a perfect man. He not only is a great high-priest, but a feeling high-priest. He is not only a powerful Savior but a sympathizing Savior. Thus we read in Hebrews chapter 4, verses 14 and 15: **Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed**

**into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.**

Our story shows us that feeling man-God who, upon being approached by his disciples with a plea for help, immediately **arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.** (Mark 4:39). He thereby displayed a great caring, concern and love for his people.

I recently saw an episode on the PBS show *Nature* about penguins. It was a fascinating piece. One aspect that I found particularly interesting was that the parent penguin (at times the father; at other times the mother) care only about their chick. Penguins live and travel in huge colonies, and there is enormous interaction and inter-reliance. But there could literally be a chick dying from exposure leaning up against a penguin (this documentary vividly showed just that situation) and that penguin could care less unless it was his/her chick.

And so it is with our Lord and Savior. We see here that he cares greatly and only about his people and their souls, and rises to their protection. Jesus well knows the world through which we are struggling, for he dwelt in the midst of it. He well knows the contradiction and opposition of sinners for he endured the same (Hebrews 12:3), and he well knows the art and cunning of your spiritual enemy, the devil, for he contended with him in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11).

Given his life's experience here on earth, Jesus well understands our various sensations, including:

- Bodily pains;
- Weariness of soul, mind and body;
- Weeping and groaning;
- Poverty and need;

- Loneliness and neglect;
- Rejection, abandonment, desertion and forsakenness;
- Misunderstood, misrepresented, slandered and persecuted;
- Horrid suggestions to mind (nightmares, depression, etc.); and,
- Agony, conflict of mind and darkness.

It is impossible to conceive of a Savior more suited to the wants and needs of the elect of God than Christ Jesus, suited not only by his power but his empathy and suited not only by his divinity but by his humanity.

### ***3. There is much weakness and infirmity even in hallmark Christians.***

There is striking proof of this in the conduct of the disciples here recorded in the Mark account. Consider –

- ✓ They awoke Jesus in haste, displaying great fear and anxiety (**carest thou not that we perish**);
- ✓ They were impatient, not waiting until Jesus naturally woke up;
- ✓ There was unbelief (**we perish**);
- ✓ There was distrust; they doubted the Lord's care and thoughtfulness for their safety and well-being (**carest thou not**); and,
- ✓ There was forgetfulness of all the mighty workings of God they had eye-witnessed.

But be assured, these shortcomings are common to all of God's people, to one extent or another. In times of peace, faith is strong. But let perils and trials arrive, and faith is greatly taxed. Look at Abraham and his amazing acts of faith and belief, but he allowed Sarah to be called his sister and balked at the notion of his heir arriving so late in his life. And David, who was a man after God's own heart, slew Goliath and experienced many great deliverances, but when overtaken by unbelief

and fear **said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul.** (1 Samuel 27:1). And you know I could recite many more such examples.

So what are we to take from this? We must not too hastily conclude that a person has no grace merely because we see corruptions. There are spots on the face of the sun, yet the sun shines brightly and enlightens the whole world. There is quartz and dross mixed in with many a lump of gold, yet who thinks the gold on that account to be worth nothing at all? Should we be quicker to see grace at work and slower to see imperfections? These men we read of believed in Christ, loved Christ and gave up all to follow Christ. And yet you see in this storm they were afraid. Are there circumstances where we should be more charitable and moderate expectations, as Christ seemingly did here? You will see the immediate reaction of Christ was to address the source of the tribulation (he **rebuked the wind**), and only after peace and calm was restored did he inquire about their fear.

#### ***4. Learn here, anew, the power of the Lord Jesus Christ.***

Behold the miracle described in our narrative. The terrified disciples awoke Christ, whereupon he arose and rebuked the gales and told the sea to be peaceful and still. Did you hear what I said? Don't take this description of events for granted just because we have many such instances during the earthly pilgrimage of our Savior.

Have you ever seen anybody effectively rebuke the wind when it blows? We here in Kansas regularly see strong winds; we can do nothing about them except endure. Those of us who have traveled to see the mighty oceans have witnessed the incomparable surge of a troubled sea. Can you imagine what kind of power can stop those mighty waves with a word or still those thunderous claps of water with a voice?

It is good to sit back and consider and clearly view the Lord Jesus Christ's power! As we see from John 17:1, 2: **Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that**

**he should give eternal life to as many as thou has given him.** The same force that stopped those billowing waves on that dark night some 2000 years ago enables Christ to give eternal life to his children. Indeed, **all power is given unto (Jesus) in heaven and in earth** (Matthew 28:18) so the believer must regularly recall while journeying through this wilderness that his Mediator and Advocate and Physician and Shepherd and Redeemer is Lord of lords and King of kings, and that through him **all things** may be done. (Philippians 4:13).

We see this power in his creation. **All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.** (John 1:3). Usually when I think of that verse, I'm reminded of the old saying "all' means all, and that's all 'all' means." The heavens, and all their glorious hosts of inhabitants; the earth, and all that it contains; the sea, and all that is in it – indeed, all creation, from the sun on high to the least worm below, was the work of Christ. He spoke, and they came into being. He commanded, and they began to exist.

And we see his power not only by the creation in the abstract, but his works of providence as reflected therein and the orderly continuance of all things in the world. **By (Jesus) all things consist.** (Colossians 1:17). Sun, moon and stars roll round in a perfect system. The seasons follow one another in regular order. Kingdoms rise and increase and then decline and pass away. The rulers of the earth plan and scheme, and make laws and change laws, and war, and pull down one and raise up another. But it's all done with the permission of the Lamb of God.

Much more could be said on this point, but my only design here is to remind you that the miracles we see in this story – together with the many miracles reported throughout the Bible – should always be before our eyes as a lively picture of what Christ has done and will do for your souls. We serve an all powerful and mighty Creator who speaks peace to our spirits! **The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.** (Psalm 93:4).



***5. See how tenderly and patiently the Lord Jesus Christ deals with weak believers.***

Look at your own experience and confirm how compassionate and long-suffering Christ is towards his elect. If you're the least bit honest with yourself, you cannot deny it.

In the report of this sea-going event, we read that – after the wind ceased and there was calm – Christ asked his disciples why they were so fearful and **how is it that ye have no faith**. He could have rebuked them sharply; he could have reproved them for cowardice and mistrust.

This throws a beautiful light on the tenderness and patience of our Lord. Few professors ever had scholars so slow to learn their lessons as Jesus had in his apostles. Few students ever had so patient and forbearing a teacher as the apostles had in Christ.

Consider examples of the behavior of these disciples. On one occasion, they **disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest**. (Mark 9:34). At another time, these men **considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened**. (Mark 6:52). Once, two of them (James and John) wished to **command fire to come down from heaven, and consume** a village because it did not receive Jesus, provoking this rebuke from the Savior: **Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of, for the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them**. (Luke 9:52-56). At the hour of betrayal, they betrayed and forsook Christ and even after the resurrection they displayed unbelief.

But through all this, what do we see from Christ? We see unchanging pity, compassion, kindness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering and love. He does not cast them off; he does not reject them; and he does not dismiss them. He leads them step by step. He sends kind and encouraging messages after rising from the dead. **(G)o tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me**. (Matthew 28:10).

And so it is with his people today and throughout the ages. He teaches them as they are able to bear. He cares for the lambs of his flock as well as the old sheep. He cares for the sick and feeble ones of the fold, as well as for the strong. He will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax. As a father pities his own children, so he pities them that fear him. **He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.** (Isaiah 40:11). All are in his book of life and all are under his charge.

Speaking about this story and others like it throughout the Bible, Jonathan Edwards – in his work entitled *Religious Affections, Part 2*, casts this light:

*And that it is God's manner of dealing with men, to "lead them into a wilderness, before he speaks comfortably to them," and so to order it, that they shall be brought into distress, and made to see their own helplessness and absolute dependence on his power and grace, before he appears to work any great deliverance for them, is abundantly manifest by the Scripture. Then is God wont to "repent himself for his professing people, when their strength is gone, and there is none shut up or left," and when they are brought to see that their false gods cannot help them, and that the rock in whom they trusted is vain, Deut. 32:36, 37.*

And speaking of Jonathan Edwards gives me a good occasion to return to the book on Alexander Hamilton I earlier mentioned (bookend). A contemporary with Hamilton was Aaron Burr. The two both served in high station during the Revolutionary War. Later, they both started careers as young lawyers in New York about the same time. Their professional and political paths crossed frequently. Hamilton rose to serve on George Washington's cabinet as Secretary of the Treasury. Burr was elected Vice President in 1800 serving with President Thomas Jefferson. And Burr killed Hamilton in a duel during that Vice Presidential term.

Burr was the grandson of Jonathan Edwards on his mother's side. Now listen to this bit of amazing providence and see if you can keep track of who's on first:

*Many weird coincidences stamped the lives of Hamilton and Burr, yet their origins were quite dissimilar. Burr embodied the old aristocracy, such as it then existed in America, and Hamilton the new meritocracy. Born on February 6, 1756,*

*one year after Hamilton, Burr boasted an illustrious lineage. His maternal grandfather was Jonathan Edwards, the esteemed Calvinist theologian and New England's foremost cleric. Edwards's third daughter, Esther, married the Reverend Aaron Burr, a classical scholar and theologian who became president of Princeton.*

*The infant Burr was born into the most secure and privileged of childhoods, yet it was steeped in horror. At the time of Burr's birth, the college was moving from Newark to Princeton, and in late 1756 the family took up residence in the new president's house. Then came a nightmarish chain of events. In September 1757, Aaron Burr, Sr. died at forty-two and was replaced five months later as president by his father-in-law, Jonathan Edwards. Soon after arriving, Edwards was greeted with the news that his own father, a Connecticut clergyman, had died. Princeton had recently been struck by smallpox, which Edwards promptly contracted by inoculation, dying two weeks after settling in. Then Burr's mother, Esther, came down with smallpox and died two weeks after her father. Dr. William Shippen took Burr and his orphaned sister into his Philadelphia home. When Grandmother Edwards came to reclaim the children, she contracted virulent dysentery and died shortly afterward. Thus, by October 1758, two-year-old Aaron Burr had already lost a mother, a father, a grandfather, a grandmother, and a great-grandfather. Though he lacked any memory of these gruesome events, Burr was even more emphatically orphaned than Hamilton. [Chernow, Alexander Hamilton, p. 191].*

Just a little something to bear in mind the next time you read or hear of Jonathan Edwards.

I love you. Amen!