

Storm at Sea (1793)

William woke up with a start as he felt himself rolling out of the wooden framed bed. As he hit the wooden floor with a thud, it took him a few seconds to remember where he was. Rolling across the floor, he realized he was on a ship and there must be a storm. Before he could manage to get up on his feet, the floor moved again, sending him rolling the other way.

Cries of “William!” and “Father!” could scarcely be heard above the creaking of the ship and the crashing of the waves, even though his wife and children were in the cabin too. They all managed to stay put except for Felix, who with the energy of a seven-year-old had leapt eagerly from his hammock ready to join in the action. William grabbed the door post and pulled himself up.

“Get back in your bed,” William commanded his son, who was walking like a seasoned sailor. “It is too dangerous for you to go out.” Then turning to his wife, he said, “Dolly, please don’t worry. The ship is strong, and you know what a good pilot Captain Christmas is. I’ll go and lend a hand where I can and be back soon.”

Dolly's protests were drowned out as William opened the cabin door. In washed a huge spray of water and William clung to the door to prevent being knocked off his feet again. Dolly began to scream, and their infant son let out a shriek. Shaking the water out of his hair and eyes, he saw Dr. Thomas guiding Kitty, Dolly's sister, toward the cabin as the ship bucked wildly. Both were drenched by the sheets of rain falling from the sky. Without words, William held the door open for his sister-in-law to enter the cabin, and then together the two men pulled the door shut with the women and children safely inside.

The wind whipped around the men as they tried to stay upright on the quarterdeck. Realizing their danger, they ran across to the ladder that took them down to the main deck. Here they found a frightening scene. The main mast and fore mast were both broken and lying across the deck, while some of the rigging was hanging over the side of the ship.

"The ship is going to sink!" Dr. Thomas exclaimed.

Just then the ship began to rise on the crest of a huge wave. Both men grabbed for something to keep them from being toppled into the sea. Then the ship plummeted so fast that William began to pray, "Thy will be done, O God. If this is the end, then please send someone else to India." As the ship fell, an enormous wave formed over the top of the ship and then came crashing down. Miraculously, the ship stayed afloat, damaged and rolling in the waves, but safely afloat.

After the storm began to subside, the captain advised all passengers to keep to their cabins or below deck, so that his crew could assess the damage. William went to check on his family and Dr. Thomas returned to his quarters in steerage. The storm had caused a great deal of damage and it took eleven days of repair work before they could continue the journey.

William did what he could to help with the repairs, assisting the ship's carpenter as he jury-rigged a new mast from the pieces of the damaged ones. It had to be strong enough to hold the sails, especially in strong wind. Captain Christmas tried to guide his ship, the *Kron Princess Maria*, into a harbor in Madagascar, but the strong winds and current kept the ship from the port. So, the crew worked with all that they had on board to make the ship able to safely finish the voyage.

The delay caused another worry. They were short of drinking water and not being able to pull into land for a fresh supply, the captain worried how his crew and passengers would last until they arrived at Calcutta. Hearing about the concern, William and Dr. Thomas met together to pray for an answer. Within a few days, the rain clouds gathered and replenished the ship's water supply with a steady rain.

Once they were on their way again, William's three sons burst out of their cabin, tired of being cooped up. They resumed their play that the storm had interrupted, being careful to avoid the crew members who thought the boys were in the way. Others were more tolerant

and found ways to teach them a few useful tasks. With the boys occupied, William could return to his study of the Bengali language with the aid of Dr. Thomas, who was working on a Bengali translation of Genesis. William did corral his sons for an hour or so every day to do language work too. Even though they were only seven, five and four, he wanted them to be able to speak the language of the country they were going to live in.

Dolly was occupied with six-month-old Jabez, who was turning into a hardy sailor. He seemed to thrive on sea air, and he rarely fussed when the ship rolled with the waves. Both Dolly and her sister Kitty had been very ill for the first part of the voyage, but now they felt almost at home on the ship. As fearful and resentful as Dolly had been at the outset of the journey, she now appeared to look forward to the new adventure. William was greatly relieved at her new attitude, and grateful to Dr. Thomas. As a physician and friend, he had persuaded Dolly to come on the voyage, and he continued to encourage her whenever she appeared to get downhearted.

William and Dr. Thomas also resumed their Sunday worship services in William's cabin. Captain Christmas had kindly given the Carey family the largest cabin. Not many attended the services, only a couple of sailors and two or three passengers who came from different countries and religious backgrounds. Everyone listened, but William was discouraged that none appeared to take the message of salvation to heart.

In his discouragement, William began to question himself about his ability to preach and share the gospel. He paced back and forth on the deck, praying quietly, seeking comfort from God. While he paced, he also began to think that he was too full of pride in his own abilities and had failed to ask God for his strength and wisdom. After confessing his sinful pride, William suddenly reached up and pulled his wig off and threw it into the sea. He had bought the wig a number of years ago when he had suddenly begun to lose his hair. He knew it was mostly pride that had made him buy it, so it seemed fitting that the wig should now be tossed away. For the next few days, he endured much teasing for his almost bald head, but he took it in good humor knowing that it was the right thing to do.

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The rest of the voyage went well until they arrived in the Bay of Bengal. Once there, with their destination practically in sight, the ship fell victim to the strong currents. The wind would fill the sails and push them toward land, and then the currents would tug the ship away again. After days of this back-and-forth motion, the captain was finally able to pilot the ship to the mouth of the Hooghly River. At last, the little missionary band were arriving at their destination, or so they thought.

Captain Christmas gathered William's family and Dr. Thomas together to explain what they must do next. "You know well," he began, "that missionaries are

not allowed in Bengal. The British East India Company has made it illegal to even transport you here, so I cannot keep you on board when the authorities come to inspect my ship.” The captain, seeing the distress on Dolly and Kitty’s faces, hastened on with his speech. “Please ladies, do not be concerned. I have provided a way for you to enter safely. I have a smaller boat that you can use to sail up the river to Calcutta. If you go carefully, there should be no problem. The authorities are only interested in the big ships.”

Dr. Thomas also tried to reassure them. “I will be coming with you. I have legal status in India because I used to work for the East India Company. I can come and go without any problem. So, if I am with you and we are stopped for any reason by the authorities, I can be your spokesman. And you do not need to worry about the Indian people. You will find them very friendly and welcoming. There is really nothing to fear.”

Kitty and Dolly exchanged glances but did not look reassured.

Dr. Thomas tried again, exuberantly taking the women each by the arm. “Come now, ladies. Let us get to the work of preparing for the next leg of our journey. We have come this far, and we have all done well. God will take care of us.” Dr. Thomas first escorted Dolly to the family cabin and then led Kitty away to hers.

The rest of the family followed. The three boys were very excited and peppered their father with questions about how they would all sneak into the city of Calcutta.

William tried to answer them at first, and then firmly told them to be patient and above all obedient. He did not want any of them to fall into the sea.

Dolly was not excited. William could see the fear and anxiety in her face as she gathered up their clothing with angry energy, and then she threw it all down in a heap. William, recognizing the signs, shooed the boys out of the cabin and turned to face his wife.

“I wish I had never agreed to come with you,” she began. “I don’t understand why you couldn’t stay in Leicester and serve God there. The church was going well, and we were all happy there. Why would you think that God wants us to be in danger in this foreign place? Do you not care about your family?”

William sighed and put his arms around her. “Of course, I do,” he said quietly, trying to calm and comfort her. “God has called me here and you know he will watch over us. There are so many people who have not heard the gospel. We need to tell them.”

Dolly cried into his shoulder for a minute or two before pushing him away and wiping her tears with her sleeve. “I know,” she said with a resigned tone. “I’ll finish the packing.”

William felt badly for his wife, but he also felt excited. He was going to meet a whole new race of people, speak their language and learn their ways. And best of all, he was going to tell them about the good news of Jesus Christ. Having to get into the country in a strange way only added to the excitement. Who

Expecting Great Things

would have thought that God would lead a simple shoemaker half way around the world! He would never have imagined it possible when he was a schoolboy.