

- ***READ Mark 4:33,34*** The vast majority of this fourth chapter of the Gospel of Mark focuses on Jesus's teaching of the multitudes and His disciples in the form of parables. As we noted in our previous lesson on this text, Jesus seems to be stressing the need for hearts to be open and receptive to the teachings He is giving to the point that they desire greatly to learn more and more. God's Word has the great power to produce incredible faith in the hearer who desires to hear, but it all begins with a willingness to humbly hear.
- Up to this point, the closest disciples of Jesus, we know them as the Apostles, were right there struggling with the rest when it came to understanding what Jesus was trying to teach. However, unlike with the crowds... Jesus would privately teach them what was the intending meaning of His teachings. This should have led them to a greater level of faith based upon this greater knowledge. This is especially true when we see that they are not only going to be recipients of His incredible teachings and explanations, but they are also about to be first-hand eyewitnesses to Jesus's incredible power as was shown through His miraculous actions.
- We might hope that Jesus's teachings and special explanations to these men might move them to a place where their faith was exceedingly strong, but we are going to see that this first miracle of Jesus calming this great storm only reveals that they still had a long way to go in their faiths and in recognizing who He truly was and what He came to accomplish. Let's begin by setting the scene, we'll then make some observations, and then we will ask a couple of personal application questions.

I. Setting The Scene

A. A terrifying voyage...*"a windstorm arose..."*

1. What started out as a seemingly regular excursion across the Sea of Galilee quickly becomes what nightmares are made of. The text begins by telling us that on the same day that Jesus had spent teaching in parables, He tells His Apostles that it would be good for them to cross over to the other side of the sea. They all get into a boat which would have likely been a fishing boat which would have held around 15 people based upon the archaeological findings that reveal these boats would have been somewhere between 25-30 feet long, around 7-8 feet wide, and with sides 4-5 feet tall. These were not small John boats, but vessels capable of hauling in great loads of fish.
2. And yet, we find in this text that a great windstorm suddenly arises on this sea. This would not have been anything unusual for it is very common for sudden storms to show up on the Sea of Galilee. This body of water sits almost 700 feet below sea level and is surrounded by highlands. When the cold air of the highlights meets the warm air of the sea...that is a natural recipe for a storm or two to spring up. This particular storm was of such veracity that the text tells us that the waves were breaking over the sides and filling the boat with water. While this storm certainly could have been a completely natural occurrence...we might do well to suspect that Jesus knew exactly what He was doing when He told them that it was time for them to cross over the sea to the other side.

B. A rare occasion...*"He was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion."*

1. With this being the conditions, we would expect for all hands on deck to be busy scooping water out of the boat to keep the vessel from sinking. However, we actually find an extremely rare occurrence here in the Gospel. In fact, we find in this text the only time where it is recorded that Jesus is sleeping. Surely we can't blame the man for needing to get some rest after a long day of teaching!
2. However, if you're like me, then you might be thinking that it is possible that Jesus simply wasn't aware of what was going on since he was way down in the hull of the boat...but that isn't what the text tells us, and that isn't the way these boats were constructed. Jesus wasn't below the main deck in the hull, but he was on the main deck in the stern of the boat. These boats would have had a raised deck on which the fisherman could sit or lie down. It seems that Jesus was simply under that deck with his head on a cushion sleeping. Which Him being right there on the same level as His Apostles, one would think that He would feel every bump, wave, and drop of water that entered the boat...and yet there is Jesus continue to catch some shut-eye while all of this is going on.

C. A natural response...*"Teacher! Don't You care that we're going to die?"*

1. This leads the Apostles to wake Jesus up and strongly question why it is that He is continuing to sleep while they are doing everything they can to keep this vessel afloat. These men were truly terrified, and it is this moment of terror that allows Jesus to teach them a lesson. We'll address more on that thought in just a few moments.
2. Let's recognize that a number of these men were experienced fishermen who had surely seen their fair share of storms out on this body of water. For them to be this terrified must mean that this was a seriously bad storm! Additionally, this isn't some tiny body of water that they were on. The Sea of Galilee is thirteen (13) miles long from its furthest points and eight (8) miles across. If they were only a quarter of their way across the sea then they would still be two (two) miles from shore. Two miles in a boat of that caliber was no short distance. We would probably concur with these men in strongly stating to Jesus that things were not as they ought to be! Again, if these men were this worried then that tells us just how serious this situation must have been.

D. A stern command...*"Silence! Be still!"*

1. As they awake Jesus, we don't see Him freaking out or being panicked. Instead, the text tells us that He *"rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Silence! Be still!'"*
2. This is not the first time in Mark's Gospel that we have seen Jesus command silence. He did the same thing back in **1:25** when He commanded the demon to exit a man. Just as the demon-possessed man was immediately thrown into convulsions as the demon exited his body, so did the winds and the waves immediately subside, and great calm came over the water. Let's recognize that this great change in conditions took place simply at the word of Jesus. In two verses we go from deadly storm to great calm.

E. A questioning rebuke...*"Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?"*

1. But Jesus doesn't only have words for the storm...He also has words for His Apostles who were now surely in a tizzy based upon what has just happened. We might think that Jesus is just groggy from having been woken up from His sleep, but we recognize that there is much more to His words to this Apostles than simple irritation for having been woken up.
2. Jesus asks questions that are without a doubt very loosely veiled rebukes. Yes, He is asking them questions, but these are questions that are asked in a way that also rebukes. I'm sure we have all been either on the receiving or giving end of such questions. These are questions where it is inferred that someone should know better or be doing better than they are.

F. A greater terror...*"Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey Him!"*

1. Yet, instead of responding to the questions that Jesus has just asked, the Apostles are certainly left with their jaws on the deck based upon the fact that this man literally just told a storm to go away... and it did. Instead of being overjoyed at their rescue with high fives and hugs all around...these men were left even more frightened than they were before!
2. This story greatly highlights the point of Mark's Gospel as a whole. Mark begins by making the claim that this Gospel will tell the story of Jesus as the Son of God, and the text seeks to answer the very question, *"Who is this Jesus?"* In this particular story, this question isn't inferred, but it is outright asked, and it is rightfully asked based upon what has just taken place! These men recognized that something truly incredible has just happened, it surely reminded them of the incredible power only attributed to God, it terrified them, but it is a step in the right direction of coming to understand who Jesus truly is. Again, we will expound on this thought in just a few minutes. With the scene set, let's make some observations from the text.

II. Observations Of The Text

A. The disciples should have trusted in Jesus.

1. The rebuke that Jesus gives to the Apostles must mean to us that He expected better out of them than what they were showing in this moment. Their fear and lack of faith were clearly signs that they were not truly trusting of Jesus at this point, but let's notice that they had every reason to trust that Jesus wasn't going to let anything happen to them in this moment of danger.

2. Jesus said they would go on to the other side.
 - The fact that Jesus said they were going to go to the other side should have been something they should have seen as a promise that they were truly going to get to the other side. If Jesus says it would happen...they should have trusted that it would happen.
3. Jesus was with them.
 - Further, they should have had great confidence that the man they had already seen cast out demons, heal the sick, and raise the lame was going to do whatever needed to be done in order to preserve His life and theirs. It seems they were still not totally convinced of His great power.
4. Jesus was at peace while sleeping.
 - Lastly, the simple fact that Jesus was continuing to rest as the storm raged should have been a sign to these men that everything was going to be alright. Even in the deepest of sleep brought on from a tiresome day...there are some things that will wake you right up out of that slumber. I would venture to say that being tossed about on the sea as water is soaking you would be one of those things. And yet...here is Jesus continue to sleep. Surely that must have been a clear sign to these men that everything would be ok.

B. The greatest danger was not the storm...it was their lack of trust & belief!

1. At the end of this episode, we realize that the only thing that truly was not ok was the fact that these men didn't trust that Jesus would provide for them in this moment. This lack of faith and trust was truly the greatest danger that faced them in this moment, and it is the very fact that this situation presented itself on the very same day as they received numerous great teachings of Jesus leads me to believe that this truly was a test orchestrated by our Lord.
2. Take everything that they had seen and experienced with Jesus up to this point. Again, they had seen the lame healed, demonic exorcised, and they had heard teachings that could only be delivered by someone truly special. How is it that they allowed their fear to overtake them and cause great doubt? It must be that their faiths were still not where they needed to be...which is surely why Jesus offers up such a rebuke.
3. Now, I do what us to recognize that fear and being scared are not bad in and of themselves. In fact, being fearful and scared are opportunities in which our trust and faith in the Lord can be proven as either legitimate or fake. The initial fear and worry were natural responses, but it was the lingering fear that was manifested in them waking Jesus in terror that seemed to frustrate Jesus because it showed that they were not to the point where they would truly trust Jesus to provide for their needs in the moment. They were still not convinced at who it was that was there with them in their presence. That was the true danger in this text, but here is an opportunity for them to be better convinced.

C. This whole experience showed the disciples that Jesus had powers only ever exhibited by God which would surely lead them toward the recognition of Jesus being God in the flesh.

1. However, following this event...these men are left with some very important thoughts to consider. The greatest thought they had to wrestle with is the fact that they just witnessed a man who simply spoke the winds and then waves into submission. For good Jewish men who ought to have been familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures...these deeds were next level because time and time again in Scripture God is recognized as being the One who has the power to command and control nature, specifically the wind and the sea.
2. The fact that these men have just seen Jesus do what He did and then they question and state *"Who then is this? Even the winds and the waves obey Him!"* tells me that they are making some connections between Jesus's abilities and the abilities attributed to God.
 - a) ***"You answer us in righteousness, with awe-inspiring works, God of our salvation, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the distant seas. You establish the mountains by your power; you are robed with strength. You silence the roar of the seas, the roar of their waves, and the tumult of the nations. Those who live far away are awed by your signs; you make east and west shout for joy." (Psalm 65:5-8)***

- b) *“Lord, the heavens praise your wonders— your faithfulness also— in the assembly of the holy ones. **For who in the skies can compare with the Lord? Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord?** God is greatly feared in the council of the holy ones, more awe-inspiring than all who surround him. **Lord God of Armies, who is strong like you, Lord?** Your faithfulness surrounds you. **You rule the raging sea; when its waves surge, you still them.**” (Psalm 89:5-9)*
- c) *“Others went to sea in ships, conducting trade on the vast water. **They saw the Lord’s works, his wondrous works in the deep. He spoke and raised a stormy wind that stirred up the waves of the sea. Rising up to the sky, sinking down to the depths, their courage melting away in anguish, they reeled and staggered like a drunkard, and all their skill was useless. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper, and the waves of the sea were hushed. They rejoiced when the waves grew quiet.** Then he guided them to the harbor they longed for. Let them give thanks to the Lord for his faithful love and his wondrous works for all humanity. Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders.” (Psalm 107:23-32)*
- d) *“This is what the Lord says: **Where is your mother’s divorce certificate that I used to send her away? Or to which of my creditors did I sell you? Look, you were sold for your iniquities, and your mother was sent away because of your transgressions. Why was no one there when I came? Why was there no one to answer when I called? Is my arm too weak to redeem? Or do I have no power to rescue? Look, I dry up the sea by my rebuke; I turn the rivers into a wilderness; their fish rot because of lack of water and die of thirst. I dress the heavens in black and make sackcloth their covering.**” (Isaiah 50:1-3)*
3. What common ideas and themes do we see in these verses? Hopefully we have recognized that each of these text include God’s power over the winds and sea and allude in some way to God’s faithfulness, deliverance, salvation, and even His power to judge sin and rebellion. The calming of the sea is a showing by Jesus that just as God brings salvation and judgment through the calming and control of the sea, so is He bringing salvation and judgment and proving it by doing the same thing.
4. I know I have heard and even made the point from this story that this is an example of Jesus simply being in control of our lives and giving us peace during our own storms and struggles, but that is a shallow application that seems to miss what Mark is actually trying to do in this text! The meaning behind what Jesus is doing is so much deeper and more valuable than temporary relief from temporary issues...He is offering eternal relief from the eternal consequences of sin!
5. His showing of His power over the winds and sea is speaking volumes to His Apostles that the One who brings salvation has arrived and is standing in their presence. When we consider this...we then recognize exactly why it is that they were terrified! The surely believed themselves to be in the very presence of God (or at least someone on His level which we know is no one), and the Bible clearly shows time and time again that being in the very presence of God is a frightening occasion. We might think they would simply be excited to be delivered, but they saw this occasion on a deeper level in which they recognized that the power of God was within this man Jesus who stood in their presence. Could this man truly be God come to earth in the flesh? This is where we are left as we conclude this section of Mark’s Gospel.

III. Application Questions

- A. Are we willing to see more to Jesus’s miracles than them simply being signs of His deity?
1. Often when we think upon the purpose of Jesus’s miracles, we simply look at them as proofs that Jesus was God on the earth in the flesh. While I believe this is a true conclusion, I believe this simplistic conclusion leaves much to be desired as far as our understanding of what Jesus did while here on earth. We ought to strive to see and understand these things from the perspective of those who either witnessed them or originally read of them in this writing. I am convinced that these men were terrified because they were able to make the connections between what was going on and what had been said of God in the Hebrew Scriptures.

2. What this means is that we must put in effort to know the Scriptures so that we might be able to make those same connections. We must not simply skim through Scripture and have a surface level knowledge, but we must truly study the text, meditate upon it, commit it to heart, and then enjoy the fruits of being able to make these connections which allows for a greater understanding. We should strongly desire for this greater understanding which will allow for greater faith and trust in Jesus.
- B. Is our faith such that we simply trust Jesus and gain comfort from His presence, or do we need Him to “do things” for us in order for us to believe?**
1. Lastly, recognizing Jesus’s disappointment in the lack of faith and trust in the hearts of the disciples, would that same disappointment be felt by Jesus towards us as we go through our own storms? Do we demand for Jesus to calm our storms in order for us to trust Him or are we willing to trust Him, praise Him, and rejoice in Him even in the midst of difficulties?
 2. The wicked heresy of the health and wealth Gospel has led too many souls towards unbelief because it has conditioned people to think that God’s favor is with them only when they are in a good place financially, socially, and physically. However, Scripture tells us that we can rejoice in the Lord at all times...even in times of struggle and difficulty. **(Philippians 3:1; 4:4-13)** We must grow to the point that we can be comforted simply by knowing we are in His presence and not demand that His power be seen through the calming of storms in this life. This can be done when we recognize that Jesus has already calmed the greatest storm we face in sin. He has safely guided us through it and He will deliver us into the other side of eternity into His loving presence.

While this text might be one of the shorter texts we will consider in this series of studies, I hope we recognize that there is great depth and meaning behind what is recorded for us here by Mark. I hope that we will be encouraged and admonished to trust in Jesus even in the midst of great storms in life, even such as the one we are experiencing at the present time. May we recognize Jesus as God, acknowledge the incredible power He possesses, and allow it to fill us with joy and confidence that He surely will guide us safely to the other side. May the text of **Psalm 107:29-31** be upon our hearts as we all continue to move forward.

“He stilled the storm to a whisper, and the waves of the sea were hushed. They rejoiced when the waves grew quiet. Then he guided them to the harbor they longed for. Let them give thanks to the Lord for his faithful love and his wondrous works for all humanity.” (Psalm 107:29-31)