

Message #14

Mark 4:35-41

When we were on vacation on Tybee Island, the wind and the tides and the waves became so large that they actually shut down the land bridge that got you on and off the island. In other words, we could not get off that island and no one could get on it. They said on the news that if there was any medical emergency, the coast guard would fly one off the island by a helicopter. At various times throughout the day you would see that reddish-orange helicopter fly out over the ocean. Now Savannah is a port city and one of the things that port cities feature in the coast guard are rescue swimmers.

A rescue swimmer is one who is flown out in the ocean in emergency situations and he is lowered into the ocean to rescue people either who are on a sinking boat or who are in the water. It is a good paying job, but it is a very dangerous job.

I read the military fitness requirements in order to become a rescue swimmer. One of the requirements is you have to be able to function for 30 minutes in heavy seas while being tossed around by 10-20 foot waves. Now I don't know if you have ever been in the water in high winds and huge waves; but it is scary. The waves that closed down Tybee Island were 5-7 foot waves. I was on dry land and it was scary watching those waves.

Most of the disciples of Jesus Christ were used to traveling by boat out in the sea. Many of them were experienced fishermen. So when these experienced fishermen get out on the water and become afraid, you know things are rough and it is serious.

We come now to Mark's record of the first of what have been called "the nature miracles of Jesus Christ." This was a very unique type of miracle very distinct from the healing miracles, the casting out demon miracles and the raising of the dead miracles. **This is the kind of miracle Jesus does to show His own disciples that He is God who is totally and completely sovereign over all things in creation, including everything in nature.** This miracle is also recorded by Matthew 8:23-27 and by Luke 8:22-25, but it is Mark who brings out the most graphic details, which Peter must have shared with him.

In Mark, this is also the first of three major boat scene episodes: In Mark 4:35-41—Jesus speaks to the storm from the boat; in Mark 6:45-52—He walks on water to the boat; and in Mark 8:14-21—He teaches them about His miraculous provisions while in the boat. **In each of the three boat scenes we learn that these disciples lacked faith and they failed to grasp Jesus' true identity and purpose.** As we come to this miracle, what we learn is this:

THE MIRACLE JESUS PERFORMED IN SPEAKING TO A STORM AND HAVING IT OBEY HIM WAS A MIRACLE HE DID SO THAT HIS OWN DISCIPLES WOULD BEGIN TO SEE AND UNDERSTAND AND BELIEVE THAT HE WAS GOD.

These disciples are traveling with the God/man, the second member of the Trinity. You would think they would have figured that out by this point, but they had not.

It is clear from every one of the gospels that record this that the purpose is so they will have faith in Him (Matt. 8:26; Mark 4:40; Luke 8:25). These disciples who had been with Christ and seen Him do some amazing things still are struggling in their faith. They still have not really figured out who Jesus Christ is. **This miracle was done as a faith-producing miracle that should have caused these disciples to realize we have God in Person in our boat.**

Now the narrative breaks down into seven main parts:

NARRATIVE PART #1 – Jesus commands His disciples to take Him to the other side of the sea. **4:35-36**

At this point, none of these disciples really grasp the Divine identity of Jesus Christ. They had listened to powerful preaching and teaching and they had seen Him do some incredible miracles, but they still did not get it. Truth is it takes some of us a lifetime to learn about the power of Jesus Christ. We believe that He can save us, but then it takes quite a process of time for us to learn He is able to sustain us in the midst of storms.

It had been a big day of teaching. He had been teaching by the sea and had taught many parables. So after a big day of teaching, evening came and Jesus told His disciples that He wanted them to take Him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Matthew says that the crowd around Him was huge and He needed a break from the crowds, so He told His disciples to take Him to the other side (Matt. 8:18).

Now apparently not only were crowds large on the shore, but some other boats were around this boat He was in (**v. 36**). They had probably pulled up next to His boat when He was teaching from a boat. Peter is the one who remembers these other boats and Mark records it. It could have been some others who were following Christ. But regardless, Jesus wanted a break and told His disciples to go over to the other side. **Now had these disciples really zeroed in on who Jesus was and what He said here, they would have never thought they were going to drown in the middle of the lake, because He told them they were to go to the other side and God enables His people to do what He wants them to do.**

I have told you this story before, but one time we were in Lansing, Michigan, to hear Dr. Howard Sugden preach on this text and he said the disciples misunderstood what Jesus told them here. They thought He said let's all go out in the middle of the sea and drown. They missed the fact that He said we are going to the other side.

Now the other side of the lake refers to the southeastern shoreline of the Sea of Galilee, which was predominantly a Gentile area (Mark 5:1). They would cross the lake from the northwest to the southeast. From the Capernaum area, it is approximately an 11-12 mile trip. Now the Sea of Galilee is a freshwater, not saltwater lake. In fact, it is the lowest freshwater lake in existence, sitting approximately 700 feet below sea level.

So it is evening time and Jesus wants to take this boat ride across the lake in the dark. **Verse 36** says they left the crowd and took Jesus to their boat “just as He was,” which means a couple of things: 1) He did not go back on the shore. They just shoved off from the boat in which He had been teaching (Mark 4:1). 2) He looked just as He always looked. He looked as He looked every other day. Jesus looks just like a normal Jewish man in the boat. There is nothing glorious or glamorous about His look; but Jesus is not a normal man—He is the Son of God and they are about to learn this.

We do not know the size of the boat. We know it was not a massive ship because he was sitting in it teaching just off the shore (4:1). Luke adds that it apparently was a boat with a sail on it (Luke 8:23), because they were able to sail part way across the sea. In 1986 a well-preserved first century boat was found that was 27 feet long and 7.5 feet wide. It was made of cedar planks and an oak frame and could hold about 15 people. This may have been very similar to the boat Jesus was in (Mark Strauss, *Mark*, p. 207).

We don't know what happened to these other boats when the storm came. Some have speculated that they turned around and went back to the Capernaum area. Some have speculated that they were destroyed in the storm. Some have speculated that they made it to the Gentile area. Truth is we don't know and Mark does not say.

NARRATIVE PART #2 – A fierce storm arises while they are in the boat on the lake. **4:37**

Now it is dark and the boat is out in the sea moving from the northwest to the southeast and this storm hits. **Just because one has a close relationship with Jesus Christ does not mean one is immune to storms in life.** These disciples physically had Jesus Christ on their boat and they find themselves in the middle of a storm.

Storms can be dangerous in large freshwater lakes. For example, since the early 1800's, there have been 6000 shipwrecks that have claimed 30,000 lives in the Great Lakes, which are the largest freshwater lakes in the world.

Now we learn a lot about this storm here in Mark, which he obviously learned from Peter, who was in this boat when it happened. There are three facts brought out:

Fact #1 - This storm arose. **4:37a**

The word “arose” is one that means it just came into existence and arose all at once. You would not have seen this coming. The Sea of Galilee is surrounded by steep hills and mountains on all sides and it is ripe for sudden storms. The cooler air currents come off the mountains and rush down to meet the warm air currents coming up off the lake and it produces rapid and violent squalls and storms. They can hit in a hurry and that is why when one sees a storm forming it is wise to get off that lake as soon as possible.

Fact #2 - This storm featured gale force winds. **4:37b**

The winds were obviously howling. The U.S. National Weather Service defines a gale force wind as a wind that is blowing 39-54 miles per hour. In a relatively small boat at night, this is a very dangerous and scary situation. Hurricane force winds start at about 70 miles per hour and since Peter is an experienced fisherman, who is telling this story to Mark, those winds were blowing at probably near a hurricane force level.

Fact #3 - This storm featured break force waves. **4:37c**

Mega winds cause mega waves. To make this even more dangerous, they have high winds and huge waves. A break force wave is one that is anywhere from 5 to 11 feet and it is caused by severe wind. The waves were large and were swamping the boat.

When we were on Tybee, the waves were 5 to 7 feet and it was scary sitting in a condo watching them. I could not imagine being out on a boat in those crashing waves.

The imperfect tense of the verb “breaking over the boat” indicates that the waves were continuously crashing into the boat. There was no let up. The boat was starting to fill up with water.

There are some observations we want to make before we move on:

- 1) Following the Word of God and following Jesus Christ does not always mean smooth sailing.
- 2) The storm caused the disciples to doubt Christ’s care, not trust Christ’s protection.
- 3) The purpose of the storm was to show them Christ is God and that He does care for them.

NARRATIVE PART #3 – Jesus is asleep in the boat. **4:38a**

Again, Mark gives us the most graphic account of what happened, obviously because of Peter’s testimony. Jesus Christ was the God/man. He was truly God and He was truly man. He is what is called in theology the “theanthropic” Person (God/man). His real humanity was tired. It had been a long, exhausting day and he went sound to sleep. In fact, the present tense participle “sleeping” indicates He was in a continual state of deep sleep. Jesus was exhausted from a full day of ministry and He is sound asleep.

He was the God/man and this storm was no threat to Him. As we will see in a moment, He actually controls the weather and the storms and this was no threat to Him. He would have known this storm was going to hit before they took off from shore, so He is just sleeping.

Now Jesus was “asleep on the cushion” in the “stern” area. The word “stern” refers to the part of the ship that is the “hindmost part” (G. Abbott Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 891). In other words, He is in the back of the boat lying on a cushion. The word “cushion” refers to a pillow type of cushion. There was probably only one on board this boat, so He was probably lying down on some boards with His head on some type of pillow.

NARRATIVE PART #4 – Jesus is awakened by the disciples. **4:38b**

Now let's keep in mind that many of these men are very experienced fishermen who are used to being out on this very sea. If they are afraid to the point where they think they could die because of this storm, we will give them the benefit that this is no exaggeration. So they decide to wake up Jesus.

Not only do the disciples interrupt His sleep; but they wake Him up to ask Him a stupid question. When they wake Him up they don't call Him God or Son of God; they call Him "teacher." Luke uses an odd Greek word (epistata) and says they called him "commander" or "chief" and Matthew uses a word (kurios) that says they identified Him as one having authority. But they are not yet locked in on who Jesus really is.

The disciples were panicking and they woke Jesus up and someone in the group asked Him the most ridiculous question that could ever be asked of Jesus Christ—"Don't you care we are perishing?" What an idiotic question. His whole reason for Him being in this sin-cursed world in this boat was to save them and millions of others from perishing.

Had they really understood who Jesus Christ was, they would have remembered—He told us to go to the other side of the lake—and since He is God, we will get there. But the storm caused them to start thinking in ways that were bizarre.

Storms can do that to us. We get in some storm and we can think God does not care, when in fact His sovereignty let us get in the storm so we would see He does care.

NARRATIVE PART #5 – Jesus gets up and speaks to the storm and it obeys Him. **4:39**

Now we know from many passages of O.T. Scripture that only God is the One who can cause the wind and the sea to obey Him (Psalm 89:8-9; 104:3-7; 106:9; 107:23-29; 135:6-7; Is. 50:2; Nahum 1:4). This is critical. Only God can control nature. Only God can cause nature to do what He wants it to do.

Psalm 89:8-9 says: "O LORD God of hosts, who is like Thee, O Mighty LORD. Thy faithfulness also surrounds Thee. Thou does rule the swelling of the sea; when its waves rise, thou dost still them."

Psalm 135:6-7 says: "Whatever the LORD pleases, He does in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps. He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; who makes lightnings for the rain, who brings forth the wind from His treasuries.

These plus many other passages inform us that only the Great, Sovereign, mighty God can control the wind, the seas and nature. It does what He wants it to do.

So if Jesus can talk to nature and it obeys Him, it proves He is God.

Jesus gets up from His sleep and He rebuked the “wind” and the “water” and said “Hush, be still.” The word “hush” means be silent and the word “be still” means be muzzled or silenced.

The moment Jesus spoke to the storm the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. Now at this point these guys should have said do you realize who is here in our boat? We have God in Person in our boat. This is God.

No human can do this. The next time we have a horrible storm, let’s see you go out and speak to it and have it obey you. Meteorologists can track weather patterns, but they cannot control them. Only God can control nature and when Jesus speaks to a storm and it obeys Him, it proves He is God.

NARRATIVE PART #6 – Jesus questions His disciples. 4:40

How humiliating this must have been. He asks them two questions, one about fear and one about faith. When He asks them why you are afraid, He uses a word that means why are you a bunch of cowards. They should not be afraid of a storm, they ought to fear the one in the boat.

But He follows that up with a second question “do you still have no faith?” They still do not have faith as to His identity. Their lack of faith in Him made them cowards. That is what failure to trust Jesus Christ will do; it will make you a coward.

Jesus Christ is the only one who can save us from our sins. When you really believe that and trust in that, you will not be afraid of eternity. But when you do not really believe that, you will be fearful of where you will go when you die.

NARRATIVE PART #7 – The disciples respond to Jesus. 4:41

There were two responses to what Jesus Christ did and said:

Response #1 - They are greatly afraid. 4:41a

The Greek is very strong here—these guys were afraid at a mega level of great fear. Now they are more afraid of Jesus Christ than they were the storm.

Response #2 - They question Christ’s identity between them. 4:41b

The pronoun “another” means another of the same kind, so all the disciples in the boat who have been travelling with Jesus Christ are questioning who this is who can control the wind and the sea. **The answer is this is God.**

God is the One who can calm any storm. Jesus Christ can calm the storms of your life and your soul. No matter how difficult the storm you are in, you draw close to Him and you will see Him do amazing things in your world because Jesus Christ is God and He came into this world to save sinners from storms.