

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

God In The Boat

May 28th, 2017

Mark 4:35-41

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles to Mark 4:35; that’s on page 839 in your pew Bibles. Generally speaking preaching a sermon involves three related tasks: reading the text, explaining the text and applying the text – but those things don’t always happen in the same ratio. Sometimes a text is so complicated that explaining it takes most of your allotted time and usually once you understand a text the application is pretty straight forward: ‘Stop sinning. Sin is bad.’ Or, ‘Trust in Jesus – Jesus is good!’ That’s the application for a great many sermons – but in some cases a passage is very straight forward – the meaning is pretty obvious – the correct conclusion is impossible to miss – but the implications of the text are far reaching and even life changing. So it is here. This is one of the most well known, oft told and much beloved stories in the Christian church, and I think that you will very quickly understand why that is. Hear now from God’s holy, inspired, inerrant and life giving Word, beginning at verse 35:

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” 36 And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. 37 And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. 38 But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” 39 And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. 40 He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” 41 And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mark 4:35–41 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Well, as I said, this story is not terribly hard to understand – particularly if you are at all familiar with the Old Testament. Most of the commentators and Bible scholars say that there are 3 famous Old Testament passages that stand behind the meaning of this text. There is the creation account in Genesis 1, there is the story of Jonah and there is the great hymn of the redeemed in Psalm 107.

In the creation account God exercises his creative Sovereignty through the spoken word. *Vyomer Elohim* – then God SAID!

“Let there be light,” and there was light. (Genesis 1:3 ESV)

Vyomer Elohim – then God said -

“Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. (Genesis 1:9 ESV)

Theologians refer to this as creation by Divine Fiat – God SPEAKS and creation responds in obedience. Only God can do that – doing that is part of what makes God God - and all you have to do is read the first chapter of the Bible to figure that out.

The second Old Testament story that serves as background for this New Testament miracle is the story of Jonah. You probably remember that story if you ever went to Sunday School. God called on Jonah the prophet to go and preach repentance to the nation of Assyria but Jonah didn't want to go. Jonah knew that if he preached in Assyria, they might repent and if they repented, God might be merciful to them and Jonah HATED the Assyrians and he didn't want God to be merciful to them so he ran away. He boarded a ship going in the opposite direction thinking to escape the command and call of God. But then God kicked up a mighty storm in the Mediterranean and the sailors immediately understood this storm as having been sent by God. They cast lots in order to determine who had offended God in order to bring on this terrible storm and the lot fell for Jonah who was asleep in the belly of the ship.

Jonah confessed it was caused by his sin, and so the crew threw him over and the whale took him in. It was the funniest site you ever did see, to see the Jonah the prophet ride off in his new

submarine. That's my Sunday School training kicking in. Disregard that last bit.

But perhaps you remember how the crew prayed as they tossed Jonah over the side of the boat.

They said:

“O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you.” 15 So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.” (Jonah 1:14–16 ESV)

So the point of that story is that God is Sovereign over seas and over storms and he may use those things as he sees fit in order to direct his people towards their proper life and calling. File that truth away for future use.

The third Old Testament passage behind this New Testament miracle is found in Psalm 107. This one is worth turning in your Bible for. Go to page 507 in the pew Bible – its page 609 in my Bible, if that helps you. We'll read verses 23-32 and you will immediately spot the connection to our text in the Gospel of Mark. This Psalm is about how different people in different circumstances have experienced the power and mercy of God. The people in view here in verses 23-32 are sailors – those who go out onto the sea in ships doing business on the great waters.

Listen to the Word of the Lord:

23 Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters;
24 they saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep.
25 For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea.
26 They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight;
27 they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end.
28 Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.
29 He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.
30 Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven.
31 Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!
32 Let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders. (Psalms 107:23–32 ESV)

Are you seeing that? You can't miss that! In the Old Testament – in the Bible – only God – only YAHWEH is Sovereign over sea and storm! He commanded and raised the stormy wind – then people cried out to him and he delivered them in their distress. He made the storm be still and he told the sea to hush. Then he brought them to their desired haven and they gave thanks. Are you seeing that? These men in Mark 4 had that Psalm MEMORIZED! They sang that song in church and now they were living that song with Jesus on the Sea of Galilee – that's why Mark ends his

story with these words in the mouths of the disciples:

“Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mark 4:41 ESV)

Some questions are so obvious you don't have to answer them; this is one of those questions. Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? Who is this? Who is Jesus? If Jesus can do what only God can do, then who is Jesus? Jesus is God. He is the God of Genesis 1. He is the God of Jonah 1 and he is the God of Psalm 107 – therefore let us extol him in the congregation of the people and let us praise him in the assembly of the elders. That's what this story is saying.

Its pretty straight forward. Its pretty obvious. This is bottom shelf stuff – the meaning is very easy to get at – but the implications are life changing in the extreme.

Do you see that?

The disciples have just figured out that YAHWEH IS IN THEIR BOAT. That's a pretty big deal, that's a significant discovery and it suggests some things that I want to work through with you this morning. If God is in the boat with his disciples, in the person of Jesus Christ, then what in the world does that mean?

What Does It Mean That God Is In Our Boat?

Well I think the first thing we need to say is that:

1. It doesn't mean that there won't be any storms

I think that is the most obvious point in the story – certainly not the most significant point, but it is the most immediate and the most obvious. Jesus is Emmanuel – GOD WITH US. He is God come down to earth and in this story – he is God with the disciples IN THE STORM. That is wildly significant. In the Old Testament stories God was OVER the storm. Right? Think about the Jonah story. The sailors KNEW that God was OVER the storm. When the lot fell for Jonah they called him up on the deck and they asked him what he had done. He said:

“I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” 10 Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, “What is this that you have done!” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.” (Jonah 1:9–10 ESV)

You idiot! You have offended the God of Heaven! The one who made the sea and the dry land. And then – to cap off your idiocy, you got into OUR boat so as to escape THE GOD OF THE SEA! What in the world were you thinking?!”

Do you see that? These men KNEW that God was OVER THE SEA! They knew he was OVER THE STORM – but here is what we learn in the New Testament: He is not just OVER THE STORM he is IN THE STORM, IN THE BOAT with his disciples. That is a new thought. The God UP THERE is also the GOD DOWN HERE. That’s who Jesus is! He is GOD with us; Emmanuel.

And yet – having Yahweh in your boat does not guarantee quiet seas. On the contrary, Jesus said to his disciples:

In the world you will have tribulation. (John 16:33 ESV)

There is a lot to think about in this first point. You can almost smell the smoke coming out of the disciples’ ears as the gears turn and they try and put all of this together; there is a lot going on here. Yahweh is in the boat – mind blowing fact #1. And yet. We are still going through a storm – mind blowing fact #2.

Apparently the presence of Jesus is no guarantee of physical safety. Let that settle on you. In the world you will have tribulation. The Greek word translated as “tribulation” there means a variety of things, let me read to you from the dictionary. According to Strong’s Greek dictionary this word means:

“afflicted(-tion), anguish, burdened, persecution, tribulation, trouble.”

So Jesus is GOD WITH US and he yet he promises us affliction. Anguish. Burdens. Persecution. Tribulation and trouble. How in the world does that all go together? We don’t get the whole

answer in this story but one thing we can say for sure is that when the storms come it doesn't mean that God doesn't care.

2. When the storms come it doesn't mean that God doesn't care

That's the second implication.

God is with us – and yet we have tribulation. We have trouble and the disciples are having a hard time understanding how that all goes together so they wake Jesus up and they ask him:

“Teacher, **do you not care** that we are perishing?” (Mark 4:38 ESV)

That is a decent question – that's a fair question. If God is Sovereign and if God is with us then why are bad things happening to God's people? Is it that God doesn't care? You see it can't be that God isn't powerful – no one in that boat questioned the Sovereignty of God – they all knew that God was powerful – but when trouble came they did wonder whether he cared.

Suffering is hard to wrap your head around isn't it? If God is good and loving then why is there any suffering at all? That is one of the big questions addressed by both philosophy and religion. The Bible does not provide ALL the answers that we would want to that question. There remains some mystery but the Bible says a great deal about why there is trouble and tribulation in a world over which there is reigning a Good and Powerful God. The first reason is the most significant and far reaching. It is the problem of sin. The Apostle Paul says:

For the creation was subjected to futility... For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. (Romans 8:20–22 ESV)

Paul says that creation has been GROANING and suffering because of sin. It is under the curse – it was subjected to futility. The Bible says that there is a connection between humanity and the earth – we were made OF the earth and we were made to rule OVER the earth and so when we sinned the whole EARTH was thrown into chaos and confusion. And so now, sometimes, bad things happen because the system isn't working right – the computer has a virus and so sometimes nature is confused, or violent or extreme in ways in was not designed to be.

Just a few weeks ago we saw that here in central Canada. We had a confused and chaotic spring didn't we? We got far more rain than our environment is designed to handle – there were even fatalities weren't there? What's going on there? The whole creation is groaning. There is a virus in the system and a lot of suffering can be attributed to that reality.

However that does not account for all suffering. The Bible says more about that, but we can't go into it here. We'll have to content ourselves with a couple of verses from the Book of Job – which is of course a treasure trove of insights on suffering. In chapter 37 we read:

11 He loads the thick cloud with moisture; the clouds scatter his lightning.

12 They turn around and around by his guidance, to accomplish all that he commands them on the face of the habitable world. 13 Whether for correction or for his land or for love, he causes it to happen. (Job 37:11–13 ESV)

God might send a storm for correction or it might be for the land. Some storms are necessary in nature. They deposit minerals from the sea onto the land or they draw heat out of the sea to maintain a suitable temperature as with hurricanes and monsoons or they drive valuable water inland for agriculture and farming – so it might be just be that, or it might be for love. God may have purposes of MERCY in the storm. The Book of Job talks about that too:

He delivers the afflicted by their affliction and opens their ear by adversity. (Job 36:15 ESV)

Do you see that? Sometimes God sends a storm – he sends tribulation and affliction – to make people aware of their need for salvation. Do you remember the brief revival that immediately followed 9/11? On September 12th 2001 there were a lot of people in this world freshly aware of their own mortality. Freshly convinced of their own capacity for evil and destruction and freshly aware of their need of a Savior. Tribulation is often the gateway to salvation. It is in that sense an act of love.

Now, the Bible doesn't tell us everything we'd like to know about suffering – but it does say this: the presence of suffering and trouble – of wind and storm – in a world over which and in which Jesus is God – does not prove that God doesn't care. Suffering may mean many things but it never means that. It didn't mean that in this story and it never means that in the Bible – thanks be to God!

If you are in the boat with Jesus and a storm comes you also need to understand this:

3. It doesn't mean that God is punishing you

You see, some storms do come because of sin – that was the point in the story of Jonah right? That storm came because Jonah sinned! And there are still storms that come because of God's wrath against sin and sinners. The Apostle Paul said in Romans 1:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. (Romans 1:18 ESV)

God still has a settled antagonism towards sin and that is a deadly reality. One time Jesus was asked about a particular catastrophe that had resulted in the deaths of multiple people and he said:

do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? 5 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:4–5 ESV)

If you are persisting in your sin – you are **ASKING FOR THE WRATH OF GOD** – you are summoning it - that's what Jesus says. So some storms **ARE** summoned by human sin. But here is the thing if you are in Christ through faith then that **CAN'T BE** the reason for your storm because the Bible says:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1 ESV)

If you are in Christ then Jesus has **ABSORBED** the wrath of God. He has paid the price and you will **NEVER** face the wrath of God – in this life or the next – thanks be to God!

So that is **NOT** what is going on in your storm. Your storm is **NOT** like the Jonah storm its like the Jesus storm. Do you understand that? If you have cancer it is **NOT** that God is punishing you for your sin – not if you're in Christ! That **CANNOT BE IT** – there is therefore **NO CONDEMNATION** for those who are in Christ so you can cross that right off the list.

So what is it? What's left? Well, we go back to the Book of Job. The Book of Job said that God stirs up storms:

to accomplish all that he commands them on the face of the habitable world. 13 Whether for correction or for his land or for love, he causes it to happen. (Job 37:11–13 ESV)

So your storm might be for correction. You might have a wrong attitude, or an idol, or an area of disobedience that this storm has been commanded to break down. It could be for correction. It could be for the land – meaning it could just be that you are standing on a broken world and you are sharing in its sorrows. Could be that. Or it could be love. God could be working purposes of mercy through your suffering. He may be working salvation – yours or your children or someone else that you will later minister to – we don't know – but it could be for love. Whatever it is – its not to kill you, its not to punish you – it is for the glory of God and your everlasting good. Therefore why are you afraid?

That's where this story lands; that is the final and ultimate implication in this story. If God is over the storm and if God is IN THE STORM with us in the person of Jesus Christ, what is there to fear?

4. It means that the disciples of Jesus have nothing to fear

And that was the primary take away of the early church from this beloved story. Remember that the first people to read this story were probably Roman Christians just beginning to face the fury of Nero's persecution. I think I mentioned in the first week that the reason Mark wrote down this Gospel from Peter was likely because Peter had been arrested and the prospect of his execution was near at hand. And Peter was crucified upside down by Nero in the first outbreak of Roman persecution of Christianity. This Gospel was written in the storm! Listen to what William Lane says about this passage. He says:

“Very early this incident was understood as a sign of Jesus' saving presence in the persecution which threatened to overwhelm the Church. It is not surprising that in early Christian art the Church was depicted as a boat driven upon a perilous sea; with Jesus in the midst, there was nothing to fear.”¹

Isn't that beautiful? Can't you picture that in your mind's eye? The early church saw a storm coming but this story reminded them that God was Sovereign over the storm! It would not sink

¹ William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 178.

the boat! God would not let his people perish – he would never let them face a storm they could not weather by his grace and in his presence. Even during the season of greatest trial and greatest tribulation God promised to limit the storm and to moderate the waves so that the elect would be preserved – Jesus said that! He said:

For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. 20 And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. (Mark 13:19–20 ESV)

God knows what the boat can withstand and he will not allow it to perish. The boat will float, the storm will subside and God’s people will remain. Because God is over the storm – and God is in the storm all the way – from start to finish - with his people. Therefore,

“Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” (Mark 4:40 ESV)

Challenge And Response:

The story ends with an important challenge. Fear is the opposite of faith. If you have a lot of fear in your life it may indicate that you don’t have a lot of faith. So let me ask you:

Have you still no faith?

You see sometimes a storm is a warning. It reveals to us that we do not have our house in order. A good storm reminds a wise person to stock up on bottled water, matches and candles – right? It motivates you to prepare for the next storm; for the big storm.

So are you motivated? That’s the question. Are you ready to come inside now? Are you ready to come on board the Ship of Christ? Because if you are in him and if he is with you and for you then you are already saved. What can man do to you now? What can terrorists do to you now? What can cancer do to you now? What can DEATH do to you now?

Little children, you are from God and have overcome them (1 John 4:4 ESV)

And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. (1 John 5:4 ESV)

Our faith in Christ through the storm is our victory over the world. So come on in and hold on tight because this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let's pray together.