

Fear of the Storm Mark 4:35-41

In our journey through the gospels, we've been attempting to sync up the 4 gospel accounts, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It's been my goal for us to walk through the teachings and life events of Jesus, as close as possible to the chronological timeline in which they occurred. My chronological bible has been a big help in that, I wanted to show you 2 different chronological bibles in case you might be interested in acquiring one and reading through the bible in your time of study at home...

As you can imagine, it surely took a lot of effort to organize the 4 gospels chronologically. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, each had their own perspective, their own way of emphasizing certain aspects of Jesus, and their own way of organizing what he did and taught. There is overlap between the 4 books, but each also gives unique details particular to that book. And the 4 books do harmonize together, but sometimes it is a little more difficult to determine the chronological order, due to Jesus often presenting the same teaching at different times and places, or due to us not having all the details, and/or because it wasn't the gospel writers' goal to present their material in a rigid timeline report. I mention this just as a little bit of a disclaimer, to let you know that along our journey we will hit a few places of ambiguity as we attempt to walk through the life of Jesus, harmonizing the 4 gospel accounts.

Let's look at the first 2 verses in our passage for today, **Mark 4:35-36**. *On that day, when evening came, He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side." 36 Leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in the boat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him.*

Last week we read about Jesus revealing to 3 different men their potential hinderances in following Him. Matthew and Luke both record this interaction, but each insert this passage differently into their narratives. Matthew indicates that Jesus had been teaching on the sea of Galilee and said let's cross to the other side, and before they crossed the lake in the boat, man 1 and 2 approached him and Jesus had the "follow me" conversations with each of them. The 3rd "follow me man" was included by Luke, in addition to the 2 that Matthew mentions, but Luke starts his record of the interaction by saying "as they were going along the road". So, the question is, were the disciples with Jesus in the boat crossing the Lake, or did this "follow me" conversation happen later, or were there 2 separate, but very similar, conversations at 2 different times? The answer is, we really don't know, but the original Greek seems to leave room for the possibility that the disciples could have been going along (in the boat), and the 3 would-be followers of Jesus *were* the ones on the road calling out to Jesus as He was leaving in the boat.

So again, it's not exactly clear the precise order of events, but this is what I imagine as I try to put the pieces together: Jesus had been teaching a large crowd, all day, maybe even all day a few days in a row- the crowd was on the beach, and Jesus in the boat on the Galilee. He had been teaching many things, including what we have looked at most recently, his parables on the Kingdom of Heaven. And after teaching for such a long period of time, at evening time, He is completely exhausted physically. So, He says to His disciples, let's cross over to the other side of the lake. And why would he say that? Well, not only had he finished teaching for the time being that group of people, but He's completely exhausted, and the way for Him to retreat to get some much needed rest and solitude was not by going ashore and trying to work His way through the massive crowds of people, no, the best move was to go out further in the boat and land somewhere not crowded by thousands of people.

And what I think happened, was as His disciples were loading into the boat and pushing out deeper, the people didn't want Him to leave. They were hoping for another miracle, or intrigued by

the drama that Jesus had stirred up, and so some are climbing into the few other available boats that are along the shoreline in an attempt to follow Him (as verse 36 mentions), and others are perhaps running alongside the road that parallels the lake, and there's where I think at least 2 of the 3 "follow me" conversations took place. The first guy calls out: *"Jesus I'll follow you wherever you go!"*, and Jesus shouts back *"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."* Jesus not only describing the way in which His followers do not belong to this world, and don't need to be distracted by the comforts this world has to offer, but also perhaps at the same time expressing that there hadn't been room for Him to rest. He was working so hard, long hours, teaching the people, being faithful to the task God had given Him, and it was now time to attempt to rest for a moment.

The 2nd guy on the road shouts out, "I want to follow you too, but let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus responds "Let the dead bury the dead". Another chimes in, "me too, but I'm going to go say good-bye to my family!" And as the boat drifts further away from the men on the road Jesus answers out: "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

That's how I imagine these events meshing together. So **verse 35**, Jesus has been teaching all day, He says "Let's go over to the other side", then perhaps the "follow me conversations" took place with these 3 men, and then **verse 36** Jesus is in the boat He had been teaching out of, it says they left "just as He was", so Jesus didn't come ashore to get anything: food, change of clothes, toothbrush, no - just as He had been situated in the boat teaching, is how he also left in the boat.

Verse 37 *"And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up."* Now the Sea Galilee is almost 700 feet below sea level, and it's surrounded by mountains and gorges- and that combination of elevation and mountain terrain can create a gigantic weather funnel that draws down cold winds from the mountains. Now surely the disciples, many who were former fisherman, surely they had experienced high winds and choppy waters in the past. But this particular storm seems quite abnormal, perhaps worse than any other they had ever experienced. Not only was the storm severe, but what probably made it worse, was that being evening time- it was dark... and then also there were several boats around them that had been following them. So you can imagine the chaos: strong winds, several boats going up and down, each filling up with water as huge waves crashed into them, the boats ramming into each other as the waves pushed them around, all while it's dark and hard to see.

Verse 38 *Jesus Himself 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?"* So, you ask, how could Jesus sleep during all the chaos? He was completely wiped out, completely drained. He was in the stern, the back of the boat, near the rudder, and I imagine they hadn't gone too far out before He collapsed, laying His head down on the cushion that one would normally sit on as they were steering the rudder of the boat. In this one particular day we see a dynamic contrast of Jesus' "Spirit-ness" in His words and teaching on the Kingdom, and yet His "human-ness" as well, as He too, like us wore a body that is prone to fatigue. And His disciples, fearing for their lives woke Him up, and said *"Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"*

Earlier that day the disciples were working through their questions about the Kingdom, asking Jesus to explain, and wrapping their minds around who this man was and what He was teaching. At the end of the day, I imagine they thought they had come to a certain understanding and level of comfort concerning Jesus and His teaching. After all, He had just asked them, *"Have you understood all these things?" (Matt 13:51)* And they responded to him: "Yes". But here was Jesus, acting in a

way inconsistent with the way in which they thought Jesus should act. They were working with all their might to keep from tumbling overboard, while pulling up the sails, and bucketing water out from the boat, but Jesus was fast asleep doing nothing. Earlier that day He had very lovingly reviewed with them His teachings on the kingdom, making sure that they understood, showing care that they would be informed and prepared for the great day that is coming.

You can imagine them feeling- *“What was the point of taking so much time to patiently teach us how to live this life in preparation for the future life, if we are all just going to die today? We haven’t even had a chance to put into practice what He taught us. What kind of Messiah would allow that to happen?”* Maybe He’s not the Messiah, maybe the religious leaders are right- could He just be performing miracles by the power of Satan? **JESUS, DON’T YOU CARE?!**”

Verse 39 *“And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Hush, be still.” And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm.”* Immediately, at His command, instantly- the wind stopped and the water became perfectly calm. The howling of the wind, the loud bumping of the boats, the rattling of the sails- all suddenly silenced. The up and down of the boat, the foamy white caps, the water pouring into the boat- in an instant stopped, the water becoming as smooth as glass.

Verse 40-41 *And He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?”* **41** *They became very much afraid and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”* They were afraid for their lives, thinking they might perish that day, but when Jesus calmed the storm, they become **VERY MUCH** afraid- their fear compounded! Why? Shouldn’t they have been rejoicing? They didn’t die, Jesus rescued them, He showed them that He had more power than they in fact realized! They should have been jumping up and down with joy! But no, they were filled with great fear. A new, different, more intense fear. Their experience of fear during the storm was oppressive, dark, and controlling, but the fear they now had was that they had mistaken Jesus’ **IDENTITY**. *“Who is this guy? I thought we had it figured out?”* They had assumed certain things about this Messiah’s identity, and they were confused concerning His identity not lining up with their assumptions, they questioned that identity- *“Are you not one who cares?”* And then Jesus revealed His true identity by calming the storm, and in this verse 41 they are beginning to realize that true identity of Jesus.

You see, as Jewish men, they grew up listening in the Synagogues. They understood the concept of the Messiah, coming to rescue His people. They knew God would empower the Messiah to do certain miracles, they knew there would be a final Kingdom that the Messiah would usher in. They had been taught this from an early age. And even though everyone had imagined the Messiah’s Kingdom would be an earthly governmental Kingdom, one that was taken by force and immediately installed upon the Messiah’s arrival, even though that was the popular belief, Jesus had been teaching His disciples that the Kingdom was different. The kingdom was like leaven in dough, working slow and unnoticeably, but would expand and grow, and like a mustard seed in the end, the kingdom would grow to be huge. And the disciples were just now becoming convinced, changing from the predominant mindset, and accepting Jesus’ teaching, accepting Him as the Messiah, even though He looked, taught, and acted much different than the Messiah they had all been expecting.

These Jewish men were also familiar with the Psalms, such as Psalm 65 that describes God as the one *“Who stills the roaring of the seas, The roaring of their waves”* (**Psalm 65:5-7**) They had heard Psalm 89 that says *“O Lord God of hosts, who is like You, O mighty Lord? Your faithfulness also surrounds You. 9 You rule the swelling of the sea; When its waves rise, You still them.”* (**Psalm 89:8-9**) They were familiar with Psalm 93 that says *“More than the sounds of many waters, Than the mighty breakers of the sea, The Lord on high is mighty.”* (**Psalm 93:4**)

So, the fear that they were experiencing was the fear that resulted in their realization that Jesus wasn't just God's Messiah, but that Jesus might just very well be God Himself. Jesus perhaps wasn't just a God empowered miracle worker, He *WAS* God- Yahweh himself disguised in the flesh of Jesus. And that... was a terrifying thought. *"Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"*..."Oh my, I think we just screamed out to God, Don't you care that we are perishing?" "I think we just told God earlier today that we understood everything!" "Is it God Himself here, questioning my faith?"

If indeed God Himself was in the boat with them, then they had very much mistaken Jesus' identity. If God Himself was in the boat with them, then they had very much been mistaken to fear as they did. If God Himself was in the boat with them, they were staring into the eyes of their creator, the one who knew their every thought, the perfect one who before Him none who sin shall stand.

RC Sproul said that *"His otherness was so alien they were terrified."* He continued to say: *What kind of Jesus do we teach? Do you only want a blessed Jesus--meek and mild? Or do you want Jesus the stranger and Jesus the commander of nature? Are you declawing and defanging Christ? People don't need that. They need to see him in the fullness of his Glory, in the majesty of his power, in the authority of his command. Nothing less will do for a dying world but a redeemer who is altogether holy."*

The disciples had feared the wrong thing. Because they had mistaken the identity of Jesus, they had thus misplaced their fear. Because they had mistaken the identity of Jesus, they had feared the storm rather than fearing the one who controls the storm. You and I often misplace our fear. We fear so many things in this life, and often in our reaction to fear, we say things like "God, don't you care that... this has happened in my life. Don't you care that I feel this way? Don't you care that those people are doing that thing?" The fear controls us, causes us to doubt, it causes us to question God's character and motives. And perhaps the most devastating result of fear, is that it causes us to miss the fact that God Himself is here with us in the boat.

Though the disciples had nothing to fear, and though they weren't completely right in their tone and attitude towards Jesus, they did do the right thing in taking their fear directly to Jesus. You and I are to do the same. We are to take our fears to Him and realize that we need to stop fearing other things more than we fear Jesus. We need to stop panicking and assuming that He doesn't care, and instead realize that God, the creator of the universe, is with us. And He is the only one we are to fear. The realization that the great, mighty, holy, perfect, all seeing, all knowing, all powerful creator God is right here with us "messed up" people, should terrify us. That thought alone should bring us to our knees in repentance as we realize that we have nothing in this life to fear other than Him.

And as we transfer our fears of all the things in this world, to fearing God alone, we realize that that transfer is the means in which we can live life without any fear at all. If we live life in such a way that we only fear God, then at the end of our lives we will find ourselves not fearing God at all. He will be our loving Father, arms open wide, ready to wrap us up in His loving embrace, ready to spoil us with gifts of the riches of His kingdom. For His children, for the followers of Jesus, the bible says that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (**Romans 8:1**) But for those who do not fear Him in this life, those who fear all else above Jesus, in the end it will not be the things of this world to fear, but the one that will be feared will be Jesus, God Himself, the one that will judge each, according to His deeds.

