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Peace, Be Still

Mark 4:35-41

There is something deeply unsettling to most of us when it comes to the sea... a primordial fear of its power and unpredictability, and its mystery. We cannot see below the surface or beyond the horizon, and we never know for sure what is coming at us. There is the simple fear of drowning that can seize us all... the fact is, we cannot survive for long underwater, and death by drowning is a terrifying way to go. Beyond that is the fear of weather – a sudden storm that can turn the once placid sea into a raging inferno of power, mighty white-capped breakers coming at us in wave upon wave... utterly beyond our ability to withstand or subdue. Then there is the terror of the creatures of the deep – bizarre looking, huge, mighty... whales with their massive size and power, sharks with their terrifying jaws, giant squid with their undulating tentacles

The sea represents the darkest side of man's terrors – and it can quickly reduce even the most courageous man to a trembling child. That is why this account of Jesus' effortless power over the wind and the waves is so compelling. It asks the fundamental question of all four gospels – "Who is this man?" And the fundamental answer is so clear – "Only Almighty God can control the wind and the waves with the simple word of his command." This story adds more vital information to the quest of our faith – to understand the basic thesis of the Gospel of Mark, that Jesus is the SON OF GOD... and what that means for each of us personally.

Beyond this, this amazing account gives us a sense of the total control Jesus has over all the hardest moments of our lives... and his ability to speak peace to our souls when we need it most!

I. The Setting for the Storm, and Its Sudden Severity

A. The Personal Setting: Jesus' Overwhelming Ministry

1. Jesus has had a very long day of ministry

Mark 4:1-2 Again Jesus began to teach by the sea. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. ² He taught them many things by parables

2. Though Mark 4 doesn't mention any healings or demon-possessed people being set free, it was the norm. The huge crowd almost certainly were there to be healed as well as taught
3. So, it was that same busy day

Mark 4:35-36 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." ³⁶ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.

4. Absolutely exhausting day! Long day!
5. The text says that they left the crowd behind and took Jesus "**just as he was**" in the boat... meaning, he had no chance to change his clothes or rest... it was right on the heels of a hard day
6. The boat seems to have been powered by wind and sail, rather than by rowing; a single boat generally could hold about fifteen people; so we could imagine a whole group of boats carrying the twelve apostles and other close disciples

B. The Physical Setting: The Sea of Galilee

1. Mark 4:1 mentions the sea... that is the Sea of Galilee

2. The Sea of Galilee is one of the most fascinating bodies of water in the entire world
3. It is the freshwater lake that is the lowest altitude in the world... approximately 690 feet *below sea level!*
4. It measures about 13 miles long, and 7 miles wide, 150 feet deep at its deepest point
5. It is fed partially by underwater springs, but mostly by the Jordan River which flows north to south from Mount Hermon which stands 9200 feet above sea level; it is a marvelous source of fresh water, supplying even today most of the nation of Israel with its drinking water
6. Over the centuries, it was an amazingly abundant supply of fish, although fishing is now banned in the Sea of Galilee because stocks got to a dangerously low level; but even as recently as in the 1980s tons of sardines were caught there every year
7. The biggest issues: the geography and the weather
 - a. The lake is in the center of a geological rift that runs 4500 miles down through Africa as far south as Mozambique; I myself have been in that same rift in Kenya; this makes the area vulnerable to earthquakes
 - b. The rift causes steep hills and cliffs on each side of the Sea of Galilee, making it effectively sit in a deep bowl
 - c. It is therefore vulnerable to high winds which can cause staggeringly dramatic storms to rise up; the narrow confines of the lake multiply exponentially the effect of these winds and storms making the Sea of Galilee a very dangerous place in a storm
 - d. In March 1992, one storm on the Sea of Galilee resulted in a ten-foot wave which flooded the city of Tiberius

C. The Sudden Severity of the Storm

Mark 4:37 A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.

1. The suddenness is clear from Matthew... as if the storm came from nowhere

Matthew 8:24 “And behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea...”

2. The Greek word for storm here is used for a hurricane... an overpowering wind of gale force—maybe as high as 80 mph; the word is intensified by the Greek word “*megale*” meaning great... this was a GREAT HURRICANE
3. Matthew 8:24 uses the Greek word “*seismos*” often used for “earthquake”... like the entire earth was moving
4. Luke 8:24 says the waters were raging, dashing and pummeling the boat
5. The effect of this hurricane wind and these raging thrashing waves was that the boat was filling with water
6. These men were professional fishermen; in their professional opinion, the boat was about to be swamped... and in those conditions, that meant certain death for all of them

II. Jesus’ Perfect Humanity vs. the Disciples’ Faithless Terror

A. Jesus’ Humanity: Physically Exhausted; Asleep on a Cushion

1. Jesus was fully man, and fully God
2. This is the greatest mystery of theology, the mystery of the incarnation
3. His attributes as both fully human and fully God are on full display in this amazing account
4. First, we can see his humanity in his physical exhaustion

Mark 4:38 Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion.

- a. Jesus’ physical limitations were part of the mystery
- b. He got tired just like the rest of us; he got very little rest; the needs of the crowd were relentless, and so was Jesus’ compassion

- c. It's fascinating that Mark gives us the detail of Jesus using a cushion... that was simply because it was more comfortable; the Greek implied it was a pillow for his head; Jesus was no ascetic, modeling harsh treatment of the body for its own sake; where a pillow for his head was available, he used it... but he hardly lived for comfort, as he said in another place

Matthew 8:20 "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

- d. And he must have been extremely tired, because he was getting drenched and the wind was howling and shrieking and he never woke up... never stirred at all

5. God needs no such rest

Psalm 121:3-4 he who watches over you will not slumber; ⁴ indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

God's power is limitless

Isaiah 40:28 The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary

But Jesus in his humanity DID get weary, he did need sleep!

B. Jesus' Perfect Humanity: At Rest in the Hands of His Father

1. Jesus was perfectly at rest in his Father's hands
2. He knew there was literally no danger whatsoever of his drowning in the midst of the Sea of Galilee
3. Imagine the news being reported by the angels: "Son of God dies in a tragic boating accident! All heaven is stunned at this tragic turn of events!"
4. IMPOSSIBLE!!
5. Jesus lived out every moment a complete trust in his Father's plan and protection

Psalm 22:9-10 *Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast. ¹⁰ From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God.*

So he knew he could sleep and God would watch over him:

Psalm 4:8 *I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.*

6. This is what the disciples had to learn to do... to so trust in their heavenly Father that there is never any cause for mindless, unreasoning terror

C. The Infinite Mystery of the Incarnation: Normal Weakness and Infinite Power

So in one passage, we see both the weakness of Jesus' humanity... and also the stunning power of his deity!

Jesus is both completely worn out, stripped of all strength, needed sleep to renew his strength... then he gets up and does the most physically powerful thing any human being has ever done

D. The Disciples' Faithless Terror

1. Jesus gave us the plain example of a man completely trusting in his heavenly Father
2. By contrast, the disciples are wild with terror... out of their minds

Mark 4:38 *The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"*

Literally: "Don't you care that WE ARE PERISHING?"

"Don't you care?????" Jesus had already shown more concern for others than any man in history

Big picture, Jesus came into the world to save sinners from "perishing" eternally in hell...

John 3:16 *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

He cares, oh immeasurably he cares

3. The disciples' faith needs to be strengthened so that they would not doubt Jesus' love or power
4. They also must trust God's plan... they must lose their fear of dying; and Christ's resurrection will do that for them

E. Why Did They Wake Jesus at All?

1. Surely, they did not expect him to do what he was about to do
2. They were staggered when he did it!
3. But they could see that he was connected well with God and perhaps God would listen to him
4. Many verses testify to God's power to rescue people from a storm

Psalm 107:23-29 Others went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters. ²⁴ They saw the works of the LORD, his wonderful deeds in the deep. ²⁵ For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. ²⁶ They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. ²⁷ They reeled and staggered like drunken men; they were at their wits' end. ²⁸ Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. ²⁹ He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed.

God controls the storm... he brings it, then he ends it!

Perhaps they thought God would answer Jesus' prayers and work such an amazing deliverance for them

Little did they expect what was about to happen!

F. What Did the Disciples Do Wrong?

1. These were professional fishermen who were bred and raised on this very Sea
2. They knew it like the back of their hands

3. They saw the magnitude of the wind, the size of the waves, the swamping of their boat... they were bailing, trying to save their lives
4. In their expert opinion, they were going down, and all were going to drown
5. They did not wake Jesus immediately, but sought to use all their skills to survive
6. At the last moment, they went to Jesus and woke him up
7. So why did Jesus rebuke them? What did they do wrong? We'll get to that at the end

III. Jesus' Stunning Power Over Creation

A. The Wind is Beyond Human Control

Ecclesiastes 8:8 No man has power over the wind to contain it

John 3:8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.

B. BUT Jesus the Master of All Creation

John 1:3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

Heb 1:3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

C. Effortless Power

Mark 4:39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

1. By the word of the Lord alone; no striving, no effort... just sheer power, absolute authority
2. That's the miracle: cause and effect; there is nothing miraculous about a mighty storm subsiding; all storms end at some point; but the circumstances here directly link Jesus' words with the instantaneous end of the storm

3. Note BOTH aspects... the WIND AND THE WAVES died down instantly
4. That is a miracle beyond all description!!
5. The wind instantly stopped, this gale force hurricane... a staggering amount of power, stopped in its tracks—not even a breeze or the gentlest zephyr; nothing!
6. But what about the waves?? The text is clear that BOTH the wind and the waves became instantly still; how do the raging waves instantly quiet down? Ordinarily the waves would powerfully slosh around in a confined space like the Sea of Galilee... maybe for hours.
7. But it became as flat as a mill pond on a still day
8. All of that by the word of Jesus' power!

D. Why the Word “Rebuke”

1. Both Matthew and Luke said Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves

Matthew 8:26 he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

Luke 8:24 He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm.

2. Why this word “rebuke”? As if the wind and the waves were living beings who were doing wrong rather than inanimate objects... air molecules and water molecules writhing around
3. But there is a sense in which the raging of the storm is part of this sin-cursed and fallen world
4. Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth and came to bring all disorder together under his own headship:

Ephesians 1:10 ...to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

5. Unruly, wild nature will be subdued, brought into peaceful order in the New Heavens and New Earth... more on that at the end!

E. The Most Visually Stunning Miracle of Jesus' Life

1. No other miracle is as spectacular as this... it is similar to the Red Sea crossing, in which the power of God makes the water to wall up on either side
2. Most of Jesus' miracles are quiet, subtle; healings, in which you had to know that that man was paralyzed for 38 years or that man was born blind; since the healings merely restore normalcy to a body... it's not that visually stunning
3. This was entirely different... if you had been there the sheer spectacle of the encounter would have left you stunned

F. Jesus Rebukes His Disciples' Lack of Faith

Mark 4:40 He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

This was the whole point of the miracle... and then again of the Holy Spirit's inspiring Mark to write it down... the lesson is to HAVE FAITH IN CHRIST!

This rebuke of his disciples' lack of faith is sharp... Jesus never coddles unbelief

Notice also the clear contract between **faith** and **fear**... faith drives out fear; if there is this kind of fear, the problem is a lack of faith

G. The Disciples' Reaction: Far Greater Fear

1. The storm made them afraid
2. The presence of Almighty God in their boat made them even more afraid

Mark 4:41 They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Fear is the consistent reaction of sinful people in the presence of the holy God... Mt. Carmel, with Elijah and the prophets of Baal

1 Kings 18:38-39 Then the fire of the LORD fell³⁹ When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD-- he is God! The LORD-- he is God!"

IV. Two Lasting Questions

- A. Jesus to His Disciples: **“Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”**
- B. His Disciples to the World: **“Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”**
- C. Translating to our lives
 1. The point of the Gospel of Mark: To bring us to saving faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God
 - a. Along with that is a constant expansion of our comprehension of what it means that Jesus is the Son of God
 - b. All of us underestimates Jesus... even still
 - c. To read this miracle, to put ourselves in the boat with the disciples, to understand that there is literally nothing that Jesus cannot do, that is to expand our faith
 2. Even more... to apply that faith directly to our lives, to drive out faithless fears
 - a. Many people readily connect with this account by speaking metaphorically of the “storms of our lives”
 - b. All of us have challenges, deeply distressing issues that cause us to writhe and roll and churn like we’re being tossed about in a storm
 - c. But when we have them, we can turn to Christ, the one who stilled the storm, to quiet the storm around us and inside of us

d. Many songs and hymns capture this sense of Christ's power over the "storms of life"

Casting Crowns, "Praise You in This Storm".

I was sure by now
 God, You would have reached down
 And wiped our tears away
 Stepped in and saved the day
 And once again
 I say, "Amen" and it's still raining

But as the thunder rolls
 I barely hear Your whisper through the rain
 "I'm with you"
 And as Your mercy falls
 I'll raise my hands and praise the God who gives
 And takes away

And I'll praise You in this storm
 And I will lift my hands
 For You are who You are
 No matter where I am
 And every tear I've cried
 You hold in Your hand
 You never left my side
 And though my heart is torn
 I will praise You in this storm

It Is Well With My Soul.

When peace like a river attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll
 Whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say
 "It is well, it is well with my soul"

Be Still My Soul.

Be still, my soul, thy God doth undertake
 To guide the future as He has the past
 Thy hope, thy confidence, let nothing shake
 All now mysterious shall be bright at last
**Be still, my soul, the waves and wind still know
 His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below**

- e. I don't have a problem with this at all... in fact, this is normal biblical speech... the Bible often uses metaphors to speak of painful trials we endure

Of the saving work of God for his people:

Isaiah 4:6 It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.

And of the trials we endure in life... the metaphor of passing through waters, rivers, fire:

Isaiah 43:1-2 "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. ² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.

- f. So it seems to be a lasting image of the "storms of life"
- g. Yes, Jesus' miracle here was physical... absolutely!
- h. But his ability to bring a peaceful end to our trials is taught again and again; as well as his ability to give us peace even before the storm is over
3. So, the lasting lesson of this miracle is to trust Jesus and not give way to fear when you are going through a storm
- a. What are the "storms of life?"
- b. Anything that causes you pain... any trial that rocks your world and buffets you around, and even threatens your life itself

- c. The three trials of Job: loss of possessions, loss of loved ones, loss of health... those are the storms of life
 - d. To expand, it could be a chronic illness; or the loss of a child through death; or the long goodbye of Alzheimer's with a beloved parent; or a wayward grown child who is openly rebelling against the Lord
 - e. Any news that rocks your world and staggers you and brings you to your knees, that brings tears to your eyes, that causes you to cry out to God, "Why, O Lord?" And then all the more if that news causes a significant change in your life—a different pattern of living, with pain attending every step... THAT IS A STORM
4. Knowing that Jesus is controlling the storm
- a. He wisely brings it... decides its duration and severity... and can cause it to end at any moment
 - b. Just as God spoke to Job out of a whirlwind, so Jesus is right in the midst of the storm clouds, right in the midst of your personal hurricane
 - c. And when he says "Peace, be still"... is he not first and foremost speaking to your soul? Your stormy, turbulent, fearful soul, telling you PEACE BE STILL

***Philippians 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.
⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus***

God has the power to bring supernatural peace to your heart in the midst of the worst storms of life

So... the question is HOW ARE YOU DISPLAYING FAITHLESS FEAR in your life? The whole world recently went through the covid pandemic... and I wonder if it is possible that there are still some held in slavery to their fear of disease and death

Jesus wants us to use our faith to drive away our fears

5. What could the disciples have done better??
- a. Again, expert fishermen, knew the Sea of Galilee perfectly; in their expert opinion, they were about to die
 - b. They went to Jesus in terror and woke him...
 - c. Why did he rebuke them? Should they have waited longer and not woke Jesus? Was God pushing them to the very brink??
 - d. No... first, they should not have been afraid that God would let Jesus drown—Christ did not come into the world to die in a tragic boating accident
 - e. Secondly, they should not have been so terrified of death
 - f. Thirdly, they should have woken Jesus EARLIER!!! They tried everything in their own strength; because they were expert fishermen, they didn't need to involve Jesus at all
 - g. But only when they had tried their own resources and they had failed did they call on Jesus for salvation
 - h. We should bring Jesus in immediately, in every circumstance... not as a LAST RESORT

D. Jesus' Final and Eternal Power Over Creation

This awesome miracle shows Jesus' power over all creation

By that power, he will bring in a New Heavens and New Earth... and the turbulent world of evil will be finally subdued

Contrast:

Isaiah 17:12 Oh, the raging of many nations-- they rage like the raging sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples-- they roar like the roaring of great waters!.

And

Isaiah 57:20-21 But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. ²¹ "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."

With this:

Revelation 4:6 before the throne [of God] there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

Completely peaceful! Christ will subdue all turbulent enemies and bring complete peace and harmony to heaven and earth!