

## Mark 4:35–41 — Jesus In The Storm

**February 10, 2019**

If your life hasn't fallen apart, just wait. It will. Every one of us faces trials and troubles where we sail into a storm. It may be a cancer diagnosis. It may be a sudden and unexpected job loss when you struggle to provide for your family. You may even face the horror of the death of a child or the death of a spouse. I don't know what trials you have faced or will face. I do know for certain that all of us will face trials. All of us will find ourselves in a storm. It is just a matter of time.

As Christians, how does knowing Jesus change the way we handle trials, when life is out of control? This morning, we will find part of that answer.

As a church, we are studying our way through the Gospel of Mark. Today, we are studying the final paragraph of Mark 4. It is Mark 4:35-41. Turn to that passage in your Bible so you can follow along as I read it.

While you are turning, I want you to know two important truths these verses teach us. First, Mark returns to one of the big themes in his letter, which is the authority and identity of Jesus. Earlier in this Gospel, we saw Jesus had authority over disease and demons. Today, we will see Jesus also has authority over creation. Second, this passage teaches us how to face life's storms with Jesus in our lives. Those are the two big points this text teaches. Let's read it together.

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. 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?" 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. He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” 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 chapter begins by telling us the setting where the storm happened. After that, it talks about three great things. They are: The great fear in the storm, the great calm after the storm, the great fear of Jesus by the disciples. We will divide our study under those headings.

## The Setting

### Background

This storm took place on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus made his headquarters at Capernaum, on the northern edge of the Sea of Galilee. In previous chapters of Mark, we saw that Jesus traveled to other villages around Capernaum to teach the good news of God’s kingdom. Capernaum was his home base. Peter’s house in Capernaum is where he stayed when in the city. When the crowds grew too big and they overwhelmed Peter’s home, Jesus moved outside the city and taught on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus taught on the beach.



For the last two weeks, we have studied some of the parables Jesus taught while at the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Earlier in this Gospel, we learned that at this time a very large crowd came to hear him teach. The Greek language used to describe the size of this crowd could be translated as, “the largest crowd yet.” Crowds of 10,000 or more people were not uncommon for Jesus. People in these crowds came from as far as 150 miles away. People in these crowds didn’t

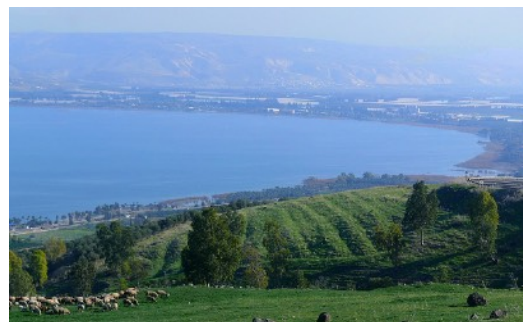
just want to hear Jesus teach. They wanted to touch Jesus, because all who touched him were instantly healed. It was a non-stop mob scene with people constantly pressing into Jesus to touch him. Earlier, Mark said Jesus was in constant danger of being crushed by these crowds.

To keep a safe distance between himself and the mob, Jesus occasionally taught from a small boat that he would put out into the water to keep the crowds at a safe distance. Two weeks ago, I showed you a photo of the Cove of the Sower, just outside of Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. This is most likely where Jesus taught the parables we studied for the last two weeks.

Today, we pick up the story after Jesus spent a long day teaching thousands of people from a boat. You can imagine how exhausting it would be to speak loud enough to project your voice to thousands on the shore. Since we live on a lake, all of us know how exhausting it can be to spend a day sitting in the heat of the sun on a boat. Imagine how tired Jesus was at the end of this day of speaking for hours at the top of his lungs, plus sitting on a boat in the sun, plus fending off crowds that were crushing him because they wanted to touch him. Humanly speaking, Jesus was exhausted.

### Geography

Another piece of background we need to know is some of the unique geography associated with the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is the lowest freshwater lake on the planet. It is 682 feet



below sea level. The Dead Sea is lower than the Sea of Galilee but the Dead Sea is mineral water, not freshwater. The Sea of Galilee is surrounded by mountains. Mountains on the west and northwest are 1,500 feet high. Mountains on the east and northeast of the lake are 3,000 feet high. Not far away is Mt. Hermon, which is 9,200 feet high. That means there is almost 10,000 feet change in elevation in a short distance.



The Sea of Galilee is not a large body of water. It is 13 miles from north to south and 8 miles east to west at its largest point. It is essentially a bowl that catches the water run-off from the mountain ranges around it. Are there springs that feed it water? Yes. The Jordan River also flows into it from the north, but most of the water in the lake is mountain water. This high-quality mountain water is one of the reasons the Sea of Galilee is a great place for fishing. Even today, 50 percent of the water in the nation of Israel comes from the Sea of Galilee.

While the Sea of Galilee is surrounded by mountains, it is only 30 miles from the Mediterranean Sea. This geography makes for some unpredictable weather patterns. In the summer and winter, moisture-rich air from the Mediterranean Sea pushes up the mountains and is cooled by the elevation. When it flows across the mountains, since cool air falls, it begins cascading down the mountainside toward the Sea of Galilee. Since hot air rises, after a long day of heat from the sun, warm air rises from the Sea of Galilee and creates a low

pressure system that accelerates the cool air traveling down the side of the mountains. This cool air is funneled and concentrated by the natural peaks and valleys on the side of the mountain. This makes the Sea of Galilee subject to violent storms that appear almost spontaneously, especially in the late afternoons of the summer and winter.

These strong and unpredictable storms are known to produce waves on this small lake that range up to 10 feet in height. These waves are so powerful that when they crash into the city of Tiberias on the western shore, they have sent water 200 yards into the city. Violent and spontaneous storms characterize the Sea of Galilee even today. They come from the unique topography of the mountains surrounding the Sea of Galilee.

Having that important background, our story begins.

### Setting

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. Mark 4:35–36 (ESV)

**On that day, when evening had come...** — When it says on that day, that means this is the evening hours of the same day Jesus was teaching this monstrous crowd outside the city of Capernaum. It was a long day. Jesus was exhausted. It is now evening. The sun was setting.

**He said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.”** — Jesus took the initiative and suggested they travel to the other side of the lake. Maybe this was Jesus’ plan to get a break from the crowds. If he went ashore, people would mob him. If he headed to the other side of the lake with his disciples, it would at

least take a while for the crowds to follow. Jesus and his disciples could rest until the crowds arrived.

While on the human level, this trip looks like a simple chance for some needed rest, as we will see, this trip was part of God's plan to teach his disciples more about his love for them and the incredible authority he possesses to protect them. Jesus was about to reveal to them a level of power and authority they did not know he possessed.

**Leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him.** — Who owned the boat? We don't know. Maybe it was Peter, James, or John. Seven of the 12 apostles were fishermen. When Jesus called them, they left their boats. They didn't sell their boats. When it says, "they left the crowd and took Jesus in the boat just as he was," that tells us Jesus never went back to shore before this trip across the lake. They didn't give the crowds a chance to mob him. No potty break. No snack break. Just get in the boat and get out of here.

If you are like me, you are wondering what a boat they used on this lake looked like. The Greek word for boat is non-descriptive about the type of boat. We know it was a relatively small boat because it was used for fishing on the Sea of Galilee, but we don't know much more.

In 1986, they discovered a fishing boat stuck in the mud at the bottom of the Sea of Galilee. They dated it as best they could and believe it was a fishing boat from the time of Jesus. That boat gives



us a good picture what fishing boats on the Sea of Galilee looked like in the time of Jesus. Archaeologists have even nicknamed this boat the Jesus Boat. There is not much left of it beside some ribs and outer board, but combining that with what we already know about fishing boats on the Sea of Galilee at the time of Jesus, we can get a good picture of what this boat looked like. It was 27 feet long and just short of 8 feet wide. All 12 of the apostle could fit on it. Fishing boats on the Sea of Galilee typically had a place for two rowers per side. Traditionally, it would also have a mast for sailing. Jesus was probably in a boat like this with his apostles. They were making the short trip to the other side of the lake, leaving the crowd behind.

When Luke wrote about this storm in his Gospel, he told us that they sailed to the other side of the lake. They were not rowing. That is a different Greek word. They were taking advantage of a gentle breeze and a calm lake to sail to the other side. The sail was completely open. It was a calm and peaceful evening. Luke said that as they sailed, it was so peaceful Jesus fell asleep. Mark told us Jesus fell asleep on the cushion, in Greek it is literally called the head pillow. Jesus was exhausted. He was taking a well-deserved nap.

All of us can picture the peace and tranquility of this scene. Incidentally, this is the only time in the Gospels it tells us Jesus fell asleep. Of course he slept like everyone else at night, but Mark wanted us to know Jesus was asleep and the disciples thought Jesus was oblivious to what was about to happen.

### **The Great Storm**

And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. 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?”  
Mark 4:37–38 (ESV)

When it says **a great windstorm arose**, the Greek term used to describe the windstorm is the same term used to describe the wind in a hurricane or a cyclone. We are talking 70-plus mph winds. Luke, when he recalled this incident, said the windstorm descended on the lake. You can picture the wind racing down the slopes and dropping on Jesus and his disciples unexpectedly with their sails up and fully open. The wind kicked up waves so large that they were breaking into the boat.

**The boat was already filling.** In Greek, that could be translated as, “the boat was currently full.” That means the waves were so big, they broke into the boat and flooded it. At this point, with the wind and the waves, bailing was not an option. They were flooded. They were sinking. At this point, complete panic set in as they realized they might die. Remember most of the disciples on the boat were experienced fisherman who spent their lives on this lake. They weathered many other storms, but this one was too much to handle. They were going down.

In Matthew’s account of this storm, he described the waves of the storm as *mega seismos*. *Seimos* is Greek word where we get our English word for seismic. Seismic activity is earthshaking activity. These waves were so large that they were earthshaking in nature. To make matters worse, we know they began sailing across the lake in the late evening hours. By now, if it wasn’t dark, it was almost completely dark.

I tried to imagine what it felt like to be on that boat. The closest I could imagine was riding a large roller coaster in an amusement park. You are diving



straight down one moment and straight up the next. A moment later there is a hard turn to the left followed by an even harder turn to the right. Remember all this was taking place in darkness with no seatbelts, in water. Can you imagine the panic?

Where was Jesus in this crisis?

**He was in the stern, asleep on the cushion.** — Jesus was in the stern, that is the back of the boat, asleep on the cushion. During all of this, Jesus stayed asleep, with his head on a pillow. It looked like Jesus doesn't care. It looked like Jesus was ignoring them when their lives were in danger. They were about to die and Jesus wouldn't even open his eyes to see what was happening.

Finally, the disciples woke him. There was nothing wrong with the disciples waking Jesus, but notice the words they used, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" Can you hear the accusatory tone?

"Jesus, we are about to die. You don't even care about us." They thought Jesus loved them. They thought Jesus chose them. They thought Jesus was pouring his life into them. Then, when they needed him most, it looked like Jesus didn't care about them.

### **The Great Calm**

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. Mark 4:39 (ESV)

When Mark said he rebuked the wind and told the waves to be at peace and be still, that is exactly what happened. The tense of the verb tells us that creation responded instantly to the commands of Jesus, its master. The winds instantly went from more than 70 mph, raging across the lake, to complete calm

at the snap of your fingers. The foaming water and crashing waves that were more than 10 feet tall instantly stopped and went flat. It says there was great calm. Another way to translate this is, “It went dead calm.” There was no waiting for the waves to die down. The water instantly went smooth as glass.

Can you imagine the disciples in this moment? Can you imagine the shock to their minds after what instantly changed on the lake that night?

The apostles, as Jews who knew their Old Testament, would have found their minds instantly rummaging through the Bible they knew for passages of Scripture that would help them understand what happened. There was no other conclusion other than God himself is the only one who could do what just happened.

You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them. Psalm 89:9 (ESV)

the one who by his strength established the mountains, being girded with might; who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples, Psalm 65:6–7 (ESV)

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. Psalm 107:28–30 (ESV)

In this Gospel, each small story about Jesus gave the apostles, and us, a constantly expanding realization of the authority and identity of Jesus. The further we get into this Gospel, the greater Christ’s authority becomes. Earlier in the gospel, we saw Jesus’ has authority over demons and disease. Now we see Jesus has complete authority over creation. He has so much authority that he controls inanimate elements of creation with just his voice.

The realization that Jesus is in charge of every created thing is spelled out with crystal clear clarity in later New Testament books.

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Colossians 1:16–17 (ESV)

Paul told us Jesus created all things in the visible world and all the angelic beings in the invisible world. He didn't just create all things but all things are for him. He is literally the glue that holds everything in the universe together.

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power... Hebrews 1:3 (ESV)

This verse is especially important. Upholds means to maintain or control something. The writer of Hebrews says Jesus controls the entire universe by just his words, like he quieted the storm.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. John 1:1–3 (ESV)

So we learn Jesus doesn't just have authority over demons and disease. He has authority over everything in the created universe because he made everything in the universe. He sustains everything in the universe. He controls everything in the universe by merely speaking his powerful words. Jesus is much greater than the disciples imagined.

### **The Great Fear**

He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” 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 4:40–41 (ESV)

Jesus said, **“Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?”** In other words, “Why were you scared in the storm? Did you think things were out of

control? Did you think I didn't know what was happening? Did you think I didn't know what was happening because I was asleep?"

When the storm hit, the problem was not that they turned to Jesus for help. The problem was they thought Jesus forgot them and didn't care about them in the storm because he was asleep. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Jesus knew exactly what was happening.

In the storms of life, we often act just like Jesus' disciples. When the world is falling apart around us, what do we say to God? "Jesus, where are you? Don't you care about me? If you loved me, you wouldn't let this happen to me." The truth is Jesus does care. Jesus knew everything that was going on in the disciples' storm and he knows everything that we are facing in our storms, and nothing is out of his control.

It says **they were filled with a great fear**. The word for fear could mean frightened fear, but I don't think that is what it means. The word in Greek translated as fear, can also mean to be astonished, blown away. Some of the Greek dictionaries I checked claim that is what this word means in this context.<sup>1</sup> I think they are right. The disciples were not scared of Jesus, they were completely blown away at the authority and power displayed by Jesus. First, they were blown away because Jesus silenced the wind and waves instantly with his word. Second, they were also astonished that Jesus was fully aware of their plight even when he was sleeping!

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<sup>1</sup> Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

This is truth we need to hear. Just as Jesus told his disciples they had nothing to fear in the storm because he was watching over them and caring for them, even when he was asleep, Jesus is watching over us. He promises to care for us in the storms of life. When life falls apart, and it feels like Jesus is silent, we have nothing to fear. He knows everything that is happening to us. He will watch over us and protect us until the day God the Father decides to call us home to heaven.

### Application

What does this teach us about Jesus?

1. **Jesus has authority over creation, not just demons and diseases.** In the big picture of Mark's Gospel, this passage reveals that Jesus doesn't just have authority over demons and disease. He has authority over everything in the universe and complete control of everything by just speaking a word. The wind and the waves obey his words like a well-trained dog tries to please its master.
2. **The apostles were just as safe during the storm when Jesus was asleep, as they were in the calm when Jesus was awake.** When the storm hit, they were in a panic because it looked like they would die. It looked like Jesus was asleep and didn't care. Nothing could have been further from the truth. In the storm, even when Jesus was asleep, he knew exactly what was happening. He had everything under control. That is why he said, "Why were you so afraid? Do you have no faith?" When storms hit our lives, it is easy to focus on the waves breaking around us and be filled with fear, rather than focus our faith in Jesus, who promises to carry us through the storm. Even if Jesus is

asleep, we have nothing to fear. He always has things under control, and he will protect us and carry us through the storms until God the Father decides to bring us home. Let us not put our eyes, in fear, on the waves around us, but let us put our eyes on Jesus, who is with us and who promises to carry us through.

3. **God uses storms to mature us and increase our love for him.** This last point will help you as you study this passage in your Life Group. Whose idea was it to sail across the lake that night? Who insisted on staying asleep in the back of the boat during the storm until the disciples were fearing for their lives? Jesus. If Jesus sailed his disciples into a storm, do you think he will ever sail us into a storm? Why would Jesus sail us into a storm? If the apostles never faced the storm, they would never have known that Jesus rescues even in the greatest of storms. You see, this was only the first storm in life Jesus would carry them through. For years to come they would look back on this moment when it looked like all hope was lost and Jesus came to the rescue to remember that when it feels like all hope is lost, Jesus still comes to the rescue. This storm didn't just teach them about Jesus' ability to rescue, but it helped them spiritually mature and know they could trust Jesus even in the tough times of life, when it looks like life is falling apart. God was not just in the process of maturing his disciples. He is also in the process of maturing us and teaching us to trust him. He uses storms of life as part of the process of spiritual maturity. Many of us think that if God loved us, he wouldn't let trials into our lives. It is because God loves us so much that he

occasionally steers us into trials. God loves us too much to let us live a storm-free life. Life's storms are the way he reveals his love and power to us. Life's storms are the way he matures us so we love him more.

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Romans 5:3–5 (ESV)

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2–4 (ESV)

Jesus sails us into storms, not because he hates us, but because he loves us. He sails us into storms to reveal more of his love for us and to mature us so we love him more.

## Conclusion

While this passage reveals Jesus as master and Lord over creation, it also teaches us how to face trials and tribulations. Instead of focusing our eyes on the waves breaking around us, we are to focus our eyes, in faith, on the Jesus who is with us. Instead of thinking trials have no purpose, we know that if Jesus sent us into one, he has a good purpose, the good purpose of revealing more of himself to us and teaching us to love him more.



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