

Jesus Calms the Storm (Who is this?)

Mark 4:35-41

Key Verse: 4:41

by Pastor Kevin Albright

“He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still!’ Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.”

For two weeks we have studied parables which Jesus taught from a boat to a large crowd along the shore. In this passage, Jesus and his disciples head in the boat to the other side of the lake. In transit, a furious storm comes up. We learn more about Jesus--who Jesus is and what he can do. And we learn from Jesus the way to overcome storms of life. May God help us to learn of Jesus and from Jesus and to trust in him.

First, a furious squall came up. As already noted, Jesus had been teaching a crowd many parables from a boat. Look at verses 35-36. “That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, ‘Let us go over to the other side.’ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.” I suppose that Jesus spent the larger part of the day teaching the crowds. The disciples must have been listening as well. As any college student knows, listening to a one-hour lecture can be tiring, especially if we are taking notes. We’d much rather enjoy a two-hour movie on the big screen. Suffice it to say, the disciples must’ve been quite relieved, even elated, that Jesus said to them, “Let us go over to the other side.” Perhaps Bartholomew hollered, “Yaa! Sea trip!” Simon the Zealot said, “I’ve got shotgun!” They must’ve been looking forward to a time of rest and relaxation with Jesus. It was their first official scheduled break in a hectic, crowd-demanding schedule. Now they had some time to themselves. It was just Jesus, the disciples and a few other boats.

Their peaceful picnic and smooth sailing was short-lived. Look at verse 37, “A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.” Here ‘furious squall’ means an intense storm. Many of us have never even been on an hour-long big boat ride, not to mention encountering a storm at sea. But perhaps you have been in an intense storm while driving in a car, so that you could barely see the road. When I was in Indonesia, I took a 1-hour motor boat ride with 30 people and the ocean waves rocked us up and down like a roller coaster. Our boat had a roof and walls around us so we couldn’t get wet. It was still a little scary. And that wasn’t even a storm. Remember that at least four of Jesus’ twelve disciples were fishermen: Peter, Andrew, James and John. But even for them, this was a dangerous storm and they felt they were in danger of drowning. In other words, their situation was beyond their ability or effort to control.

Sometimes we hear advice like, “You can overcome anything if you put your mind to it.” We all know the maxim, “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.” The problem with these sayings is that they assume human effort can always prevail. I’m sure that the people who made up these mottos did not make them up in the middle of a storm, but after it was over. Moreover, these sayings were written from the standpoint that the storm was not beyond their effort or ability to control. In other words, they did not reach the end of their rope. They still had some strength left, or some money in the bank, or someone or something else to turn to in order to solve their problem. But if you hit a storm that you simply cannot do anything to overcome, then what are you going to do? Consider the Titanic after it hit the iceberg. That was a storm of major proportions. Nothing could help the Titanic to float. Not hard work. Not positive thinking. Not even prayer could make the Titanic float. As much as we would like it, life is not smooth sailing. Life is full of storms, some minor and some major. What are some of the storms people face? There are storms involving disease, death, job, homework, marriage (or singleness), children, lawsuits, threats. Probably you are in some kind of storm now, even a minor one.

The disciples were afraid of drowning. The Bible identifies two kinds of fear, a good kind and a bad kind. The bad kind is the fear of death. The fear of death includes other fears, like the fears of failure, defeat, pain, suffering, hardship and loss. These fears cause us to seek the least pain with the most gain. These fears make us captive to sin. One young Christian man was faithful to Bible study until he got a non-Christian girlfriend. He is fearful of saying “no” to this girl, thinking he will lose too much. Another young man knows that Bible study and prayer is good and has helped him to have peace and meaningful direction for his life. But he is fearful to make any commitment, even to regular Bible study or worship. The devil holds people in slavery to fear (Heb 2:15). We must overcome this kind of fear.

So how can one overcome this fear? To overcome the fear of death, one must have the other kind of fear—the good kind, which is the fear of God. We must fear God more than anything, even death. To fear God is to have an awesome respect for God, like a child fears his father, while loving him at the same time. Jesus said in Matthew 10:28, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Isaiah said similarly (8:13), “The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread...”

Second, Jesus is the Lord of peace. Though the boat was taking in water from the storm, Jesus was sleeping in the stern on a cushion. I suppose that Jesus was inside in a cabin area, so he wasn't getting wet. It's just my guess. To be sure, the boat was rocking. But for Jesus, it was like a baby's cradle. Jesus was sleeping peacefully. I believe this shows us two things about Jesus. It shows us that Jesus was human. Jesus was not a superman, who never needed to eat or sleep. Jesus was exhausted after a long day's work of preaching and teaching. Jesus fell into sweet sleep, even though a storm was raging around him.

It also shows us that Jesus had peace during the storm. One might argue, “That's because he was sleeping. He didn't know what was going on.” But when we were awakened, he was not alarmed at all. One name for Jesus is Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6). Jesus promised his disciples shortly before his death, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (Jn 15:27) Actually God promised this peace to his people Israel as well. Isaiah 26:3-4 says, “[The LORD] will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.” When we trust in God and in Jesus Christ, we have the gift and promise of his peace.

Third, Jesus is Lord of creation. The disciples were in a precarious situation, or so they thought. They woke Jesus saying, “Teacher, don't you care if we drown?” The disciples were surprised that Jesus was sleeping, even though they felt that their lives were hanging by just a thread. To them, it seemed like Jesus did not care about them or their situation. Sometimes in a crisis we may feel that God doesn't know our situation or God doesn't care. One young man is dying of AIDS. He recently wrote in an email, “...in the midst of all my problems...I do not see God doing anything...” God knows and cares more than he realizes.

What did Jesus do after they woke him? Did he join in their fearful frenzy? Not at all. Look at verse 39. “He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still!’ Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.” Jesus did not get mad at his disciples for waking him up. Jesus dealt with the problem quickly and decisively. Jesus got up and rebuked the wind and water, “Quiet! Be still!” Usually people who speak to inanimate things need psychological help. But Jesus did not exhibit any signs of psychosis. What is more, when ordinary people say things like this, nothing happens.

Then why did Jesus speak to the wind and the waves? And more amazingly, how did the storm subside right at that moment? Was it a coincidence? The disciples didn't think so. They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” They knew that the storm ceased as a direct result of Jesus' command, “Quiet! Be still!” Some Christian scholars suggest that Jesus was rebuking demonic forces at work behind the scenes. That is possible. Yet the text clearly says that Jesus rebuked the wind and spoke to the waves.

Until that moment, Jesus' disciples had seen Jesus heal the sick and drive out demons. But this miracle was on a whole new level. This went from personal contact miracles to control of the weather. Who is Jesus that he can control the weather, not with a prayer, but with a direct command? Who has ever commanded nature and it obeyed? Only God. In Genesis 1:3 God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. Jesus is Lord of creation. For example, the one who can command a dog, “Sit!” or “Stay!” and expect the dog to obey is the owner and master. When Jesus spoke, “Quiet! Be still!”, the wind and the waves recognized their Maker's voice and obeyed.

Jesus' word has divine power in it for it is the word of God. Man's words are often weak, inconsistent and not very trustworthy. In contrast, Jesus' words are powerful, reliable and worthy of our trust. Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” (13:31)

Once Peter liked his idea a little better than Jesus' word. So when Jesus foretold his own suffering, death and resurrection, Peter said, “Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!” Jesus rebuked Peter, “Get behind me, Satan!

You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” Later, Peter embraced Jesus and his words as the truth. Peter proclaimed, agreeing with the prophet Isaiah, “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.” (1Pe 1:24-25; Isa 40:6-8)

Fourth, faith dispels fear. Jesus stilled the stormy sea. Then he had something to say to his disciples. Look at verse 40. “He said to his disciples, ‘Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?’” Here Jesus connects fear of death with a lack of faith. In other words, faith in God overcomes all fear. This is the same as saying that if we fear God, all other fears will dissolve and disappear.

Boy David, the youngest of eight brothers, was too young to join the Israelite army. But he loved God. So when he heard God’s name being dishonored by a Philistine champion fighter, David challenged him. David could not challenge Goliath by his ability or size; David was simply too young, too small and too inexperienced. But David did not trust in weapons. David came against Goliath in the name of the Lord Almighty, whom Goliath had defied. David knew, as Paul later said, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” With faith in God, David defeated the giant Goliath and won a great victory for God’s glory (1Sa 17).

The prophet Elijah felt like the only faithful Israelite left in the time of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, who were leading all Israel astray in Baal worship. But Elijah loved and obeyed God, fearlessly challenging Baal’s prophets in a contest to prove who is the living God—Baal or the Lord God of Israel. With faith in God, Elijah defeated and eliminated the false prophets of Baal, and turned his people’s hearts back to God (1Ki 18).

What have we learned? We have seen that Jesus is the Lord of peace and the Lord of creation. Jesus has divine power to control a storm. A young man at Virginia Tech faced a personal storm and was overcome by it. His response was to blow up in anger. Then the devil used him to kill and destroy. Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (Jn 10:9,10) Without Jesus, when we face a storm, we easily succumb to fear, doubt, despair, anger or sorrow.

Horatio Spafford also faced personal storms. He was a wealthy man, who lost most of his wealth in the Great Chicago Fire in 1871. Two years later, he lost four daughters when they drowned in a ship collision in the Atlantic Ocean. His wife, who survived the wreck, sent him a telegraph message with the words, “Saved alone.” When he himself crossed the Atlantic on another ship, the captain gave him notice when they were above the place where his daughters had drowned. Horatio Spafford was inspired to write these words on the spot: When peace like a river attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll, Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, “It is well, it is well with my soul.” Horatio Spafford did not succumb to bitterness or despair. The Lord brought him through his storms of life and he left a powerful legacy of faith to others.

With faith and trust in Jesus, we can overcome fear and have peace in a storm. St. Paul was caught in a stormy Mediterranean Sea with 275 other people on the ship. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, they finally gave up all hope of being saved. But Paul stood up and said to them, “Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’ So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.” Later, Paul took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves (Ac 27:23-36).

As long as Jesus is in our boat, we have nothing to fear, for our boat cannot and will not sink with Jesus in it. Contrary to popular psychology, we cannot overcome fear by trying to be the captain of our lives or the controller of our own destinies. Rather, when we trust in the Lord, he gives peace, freedom and victory. Proverbs 3:5-7 promises, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.” And as another Scripture says, “...the one who trusts will never be dismayed.” (Isa 28:16; Ro 10:11) Storms are opportunities to build up faith in Jesus and to grow in Christ’s likeness. So the aim of life is not to avoid, prevent or stop storms. We need to fear only God, and put our faith and trust in Jesus, then he will calm the storms as he sees fit.