

Human Impossibility + Urgency = A Divine Miracle

Mark 4:35-41

Introduction

Please turn in your Bible to Mark 4:35-41, as we continue our study through the Gospel of Mark.

On that day, when evening came, He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side."

Leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in the boat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him.

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.

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?"

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.

And He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

They became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

There is almost nothing more capable of striking terror in the heart of a student – whether in junior or senior high school, college, or graduate school – than the teacher announcing the date of some future exam – upon which the entire semester will ride. I say

“almost” nothing more capable of striking terror because, I think the greatest terror to the heart of a student is when the teacher stands behind the rostrum and says, “Pull out a sheet of paper. I’m going to give a pop quiz.”

There is no possibility of studying for a pop quiz. However, I did learn how to get at least thirty seconds of studying in because in the time it took to remove my book from my desk, I could open it to the chapter and skim it. I think that is how I learned to speed read!

However, it is not really possible to study. In fact, the grade is going to be based entirely upon whether or not you have been listening in class.

In our text today, we find Jesus Christ taking the disciples out and giving them a kind of pop quiz.

The entire chapter 4 of the Gospel of Mark, as we studied in our last discussion, has been nothing more than the repetition of facts. Jesus has been teaching with parables and He says at the end of each one, “Have you been listening? If you have ears to hear, hear! Listen!”

Now, Jesus takes the disciples out of that situation, puts them on a little boat, and is about to give a pop quiz to determine whether or not they have been listening. We will find that they fail the quiz miserably. Yet in the process, they learn some things that literally, will revolutionize their lives.

Jesus Teaches in a Storm

Look with me again at Mark 4:35.

On that day, when evening came, He said to them [His disciples], "Let us go over to the other side."

We should underline the phrase, "Let us go over to the other side" because they did not even hear that. I think they thought they heard, "Let's go to the middle of this Sea of Galilee and drown."

No. He said, "Let us go over to the other side."

Note that, because later in the story, it will seem as if the disciples had not heard Him.

This is at the end of one of the busiest days in Christ's ministry. He has spoken time and time again. The crowds are pressing Him so much that He has been forced off that shore and into a little fishing boat, which He uses as a rostrum. He is seated in the boat and teaches the multitudes as they press Him. The diseased; the sick are there and He is healing. He has had an incredibly busy day. It is as if He tells the disciples, "We've got to get away for just a little bit, so let's go to the other side. Let's leave the busy side of Capernaum; this busy western shore, and let's go east and relax."

However, look at the next verse, verse 36, which says,

Leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in the boat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him.

He could not get rid of these people. He sends them away, takes off with His disciples in their fishing boat, and these people run for boats and start after Him. So there is a little cluster of boats heading across the Sea of Galilee. They will not let Him go. I do not think I would have either, if I had been in the crowd, nor would you.

The next thing that happens is something that you would think would have been very familiar to the disciples. Look at Mark 4:37.

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.

The word that is translated "fierce gale of wind" in this verse, is a word that could be translated "cyclone" or "hurricane". This was not just a little pitter-patter of water on the waves. This was serious. This was a storm that could take all of their lives. It was a cyclone.

It may be helpful to understand that the Sea of Galilee was 680 feet below sea level and was

surrounded by small hills. In the distance stood Mount Hermon, rising above the horizon. Wind would rush down from this cold mountain peak, in this almost natural funnel, and would empty over the Sea of Galilee. It would cause incredible furry. A storm like this could come from anywhere in one to fifteen minutes; it could happen very quickly. If you were a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee, you were aware that impending danger was there every time you got into your boat.

That is exactly what happened to the disciples. The cold air came rushing down into that little valley and was met by the warm air rising above the sea. The result was almost as if the wind collided and whipped the water into a furry. The disciples were afraid. Their boat was filling up. I do not know about the other boats, but perhaps, theirs were even smaller.

We have the idea, possibly from pictures used in Sunday school teaching, that the disciples were in something that looked a little like the *Mayflower*. We think they were on a large ship, but they were not. The disciples were in a small fishing craft and it was tossing back and forth.

Notice, in Mark 4:38a, we are told,

Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; . . .

In the back of the boat would be a little seat. They would perhaps, give that to a guest or a female person who is riding along. On that seat was a small leather cushion. Evidently, Jesus had gotten on that boat and headed straight to the back seat. In fact, Luke 8:23 adds the thought that it is as if Jesus' head hit the pillow and He was asleep. So, He heads to the back of the boat, finds that little cushion, curls up on that bench, and rests His head on that leather pillow.

Visualize this with me. The storm comes and the waves begin to beat that little craft, making it rock to and fro. Jesus is so exhausted that He is fast asleep. I do not think He was pretending to be asleep, while kind of watching to see what His disciples were doing. He was tired and He was asleep. He was human! He was all man, though He was all God – and He was completely asleep.

So, the disciples come to Him and say, in Mark 4:38b,

. . . Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

You should underline the little word “we”.

It is fascinating that in their frantic outcry, the disciples had waited until the last possible moment to come to Jesus Christ. In fact, we were told in the last phrase of verse 37 that,

. . . the boat was already filling up.

You might think, “Why in the world didn’t they go to Jesus when the waves started?”

The disciples waited until the very last moment. The boat was full and *then* they go to Jesus and say, “Teacher, don’t You care that we are perishing?”

Understand that the disciples are including not only themselves, but Jesus in this question. They are saying, “Lord, don’t You understand that we’re all going for a swim – including You? Don’t You care that You’re about to die?”

Do you see the problem? They have been listening to all of the stories in Mark, chapter 4; they have been in the classroom. Yet, they really had not been listening.

The King has been presenting Himself as the One who would bring in the future kingdom. He is the Christ – and the disciples have accepted it, “Sure, He’s Lord . . . but He is about to die.”

I think we are exactly like the disciples. We sing the chorus, almost glibly, “He is Lord, He is Lord. Oh, He is Lord.” . . . but He cannot handle our situation.

In other words, we, like the disciples, ask, “Master, don’t You care that all of us are about to go to the bottom of this sea?”

Look at the next verse, Mark 4:39.

And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Hush, be still.” . . .

“Be still” is literally, “be muzzled”.

Jesus said the same thing, as we studied in chapter 1 of Mark, to the individual who was possessed by a demon. You may remember that the demon says,

. . . I know who You are – the Holy One of God!” (Mark 1:24)

Jesus does not want this demon introducing His character to the crowd, so He says to the demon,

. . . “Be quiet . . .” (Mark 1:25)

This is literally, “Be muzzled”.

This is fascinating because, in the time of Christ, the rabbis taught that behind any storm or any natural element that seems out of control, is the satanic force of the demon world. The rabbis were very superstitious. It is interesting that these men studied the Bible day after day, yet they came to the conclusion that if there was a storm, the process was being energized by a group of demons.

Now Jesus stands up, addresses the storm, using terminology that they would understand, “Be muzzled,” as if He is speaking to a person. Look at the last phrase of Mark 4:39,

. . . “Hush, be still.” And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm.

The story began with a great storm and it ends with a great calm.

Now, if we had a bucket of water and wanted to create a miniature storm in it, we would start moving the bucket and sloshing the water around. We might stick a hand in and stir it around to get the water rushing about. Then, if we stopped moving the bucket and held it, it would probably take about thirty seconds for the water to cease moving. But Luke 8:24 adds the thought that when Jesus Christ stood and said, “Be muzzled,” the water became instantly calm. That was as much a miracle as the fact that He stopped the storm.

I can picture in my mind, the disciples in that little boat. The waves are literally, washing over the top of that little craft, and they are terrified. It is at night, as well, which makes it even more frightening. Jesus is asleep, while they are trying to dip water out of that boat to keep themselves afloat – and here comes another huge wave. Now, I can just see Peter raising his arm to shield his eyes from the spray – and there is nothing. He kind of looks around, and perhaps, over the edge of the boat, and the water is as calm as a mirror. I wish I had been there to see that happen.

Notice, in Mark 4:40, the Savior’s loving reproach.

And He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

Now Jesus has been wiping the noses of these disciples. He has been making sure they had something to eat. He has been taking care of them all of these days, day in and day out. Yet, when a problem occurs, the first thing they say is, “You don’t care about us.”

If I had been Jesus, I think I would have stopped the storm and said, “Sit down, men, you’re all fired. What do you mean, don’t I care?”

Jesus never does that, however. He never reproves their fear. He does say,

. . . *“Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?”*

I misunderstood this passage until I had the privilege of studying it this entire week. I used to think that the disciples, in verse 40, were still fearful of the storm. But, the storm is over. They are now fearful because of the calm. The storm had introduced the fear, but Jesus solved that problem. In fact, if you do not believe me, look at Mark 4:41a.

They became very much afraid . . .

The disciples are still afraid. First, they were fearing the storm; now they are fearing the calm. Why? Because their eyes had been opened that Jesus Christ might really be who He says He is.

In other words, “I believe He’s Lord. I say He’s Lord. He is the Christ, but this is serious – He really is!”

It is as if Jesus Christ pulled back the curtain on His character and revealed His sovereignty over the natural elements.

Now, we can fix a lot of things – a mother can dry some tears; a repairman can fix some broken equipment; you may be able to fix your car when it is broken down. However, the weather – we cannot fix. When it rains, we live with it and carry an umbrella. When it is cold, we bundle up. We cannot change it.

That is the way these disciples observed nature – no one could intervene. Yet, Jesus Christ reveals His sovereignty by displaying the ability to intervene in the natural world. He is stating, “I am Christ, the sovereign over planet earth.”

The disciples begin to wake up. They realized, perhaps even for the first time, that Jesus Christ was *really* the Christ. The Lord was teaching them through a storm.

Jesus does not say, “I can’t believe that you would even suggest that I don’t care about you.”

He is really saying, I think in love, “How is it that you have no faith? Do you still not understand who I am?”

The problem was not necessarily the circumstances outside of the boat – the waves and the

storm and the wind. The problem was within. The object of their faith was so weak. They had traveled with Christ and knew Him, or at least, they thought they did. Yet, when the storm came, they had no comprehension of His character. It was not necessarily the amount of faith that was the problem, it was the object of their faith.

If I invited you into my living room and said, “Have a seat here,” and pointed to a chair that was made of toothpicks, strung together by string and a little glue, and maybe, a rubber band or two, you would look at me and say, “Mind if I stand?”

“Well, don’t you have any faith? Then sit over here on the big sofa.”

“Oh, no problem.”

The problem is not that you had little faith and you had great faith, it was the object of your faith. This was weak; this is strong.

The disciples proved that the object of their faith, in their mind, was a weak man – just a mere human. “Yea, Jesus, we believe that You are the King of the coming kingdom . . . but You’re still just like us.”

The object of the disciples’ faith was weak. Jesus Christ pulls back the curtain so they can see that the object of their faith is not a mere man, but the Christ of planet earth.

Application – Lessons to Learn in a Storm

There are lessons in this for us to learn. They are lessons that I believe, you and I will learn only in the storm.

Are you facing a storm today, perhaps? If so, it has been divinely engineered so that you might learn more of the character of Jesus Christ.

I think there is more that we can learn in storms. I will give three lessons that the disciples learned that I think, Jesus wants us to learn today, as well.

1. Number one, Jesus Christ desires not only to impart faith, but to develop faith.

He wants to take the mush of your faith and turn it into muscle. He will do it by adversity; He will do it through a storm. He will take wind and waves; He will take situations that seem out of control, so that you might strengthen the object of your faith.

Jesus could have left us alone after we were saved. He could have said, "Well, you're now on your way to heaven. That's good enough for Me."

However, that was absolutely not what He did. Jesus wants to develop the sinew of your faith so that you can have a strong relationship with Him in adversity.

2. Number two, Jesus Christ wants to shatter our competency to develop trust in His sufficiency.

One of the things that I love about this entire episode is that Jesus Christ takes the disciples to their backyard; He takes them to their turf. If anyone knew the Sea of Galilee, it was the disciples. They knew every inch of shoreline; they knew the wind; they knew the waves. They had roughed their way through many storms on that lake. They are competent fishermen and have been doing it all of their lives. Jesus Christ takes them to the place where they consider themselves the strongest and is going to teach them something of Himself.

You and I have areas in our lives that we think we have it all together.

We might think, "I know I have problems over here, but look, my financial situation is strong. I've got that under control."

Then, "bang," a tree falls through your garage.

We might think, "I've got some problems, but listen, my marriage is impenetrable."

Then, a difficulty comes.

We might think, "You know, I have a lot of problems with lack of discipline, but every morning at 6 a.m., I'm up reading the Bible."

We have all of these different areas where we think we are totally competent. We think, "Lord, you can relax in this area – I've got it under control."

Yet, Jesus Christ will sometimes take us to that very area and shatter our competency to teach us to be sufficient in His strength.

3. Number three, Jesus Christ does not promise the absence of storms, but He guarantees His presence in the storm.

Jesus does not promise exemptions from pop quizzes, but He promises enablement.

It is fascinating that Jesus Christ is in the boat with the disciples, and yet, they are frantic. They are thinking that they are about to die, while the Lord of the universe is right beside them sleeping on a cushion.

I wonder what would have happened if the disciples had gone to Jesus about ten minutes earlier – before they became so terrified. What would have happened if the rain had just started and they saw this "lailaps"; this storm coming and said, "Lord, we're in trouble, can You solve it?"

However, the disciples decided, "We're going to take care of this problem. We're going to bail out the water. Just let Jesus sleep."

I love the fact that Jesus Christ was there all the time.

Ladies and gentlemen, I do not know what storm you might be facing today, but I will bet that you are facing something. Perhaps you are facing some difficulty; some trial in an area of your life in which you cannot believe you are having trouble. You thought you had that area all mapped out and then, "bang!"

I think Jesus Christ is trying to teach us, through the inadequacy of the disciples, that He is sufficient. If we will only recognize that we are incompetent and then, learn to rely on Him; learn to rely on the fact that Jesus Christ is the sovereign Christ over the natural elements of this world.

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