

## Jason Upchurch - Mark 4:35-41 - The Good News that Jesus Controls the Weather

This morning as we come to one of the best known stories in the gospels - the calming of the Sea of Galilee. And just to be clear - by story I don't mean a fictional story. There are many people who believe this amazing event is a tall tale or an embellishment or a coincidence of nature.

But it's not. It's the true story of the time the entire Kingdom of God was in a boat and almost drowned. And here in Mark we see yet another transition in Jesus's ministry. In chapter 4 we saw a transition from plain preaching to parable preaching. Jesus's ministry definitely took a turn as the Jewish leaders continued to reject him.

Here we see a transition as well in terms of the power of Jesus. Already we've seen Jesus perform absolutely unbelievable acts of power to heal people and cast out demons. He has stayed up all night long healing whole cities and casting out demon after demon. It is beyond dispute that Jesus as God is powerful.

But beginning here in **Mark 5** we see the power of Jesus displayed on an even greater level than anything we have seen before in Mark's gospel. If you remember from our very first survey of Mark's gospel, Jesus becomes more amazing on every page and we see that clearly here as Jesus manifests more power and more grace.

Starting with the calming of the sea we see 4 miracles all in a row that are greater than anything Jesus has done before.

First we have the calming of the sea, which is the first of Jesus's nature miracles. What we've seen so far are healings and exorcisms, which are amazing. But Jesus now begins to manifest his sovereign, divine power over the physical world in nature miracles. He'll calm the sea and in a few chapters he'll walk on the sea, wither a fig tree instantly, and he'll multiply food. These all show his power over the natural order.

Now, just to be clear, he's done these nature miracles all throughout his ministry. His very first ever miracle was changing water into wine - a nature miracle. But what we need to understand is that Mark is framing Jesus's life here. And the further we go on the more amazing Jesus is. That's what he wants us to see because that's how the disciples experienced Jesus as well.

The second miracle we see in this section is also a next-level miracle: the casting out of the demon, Legion. Jesus has cast out demons before in Mark's gospel; exorcism was actually the very first miracle Mark mentioned in his gospel. But what Mark is sketching for us is that Jesus doesn't just have power over individual demons, but he has power over the entire spiritual realm and he can just as easily cast out thousands of demons as he can cast out one demon. Nothing is too hard for the Lord, and he does all things well.

But wait, there's more. Jesus then is asked to come heal a little girl who is deathly ill. On the way to the girl, a woman with hemorrhaging delays Jesus by simply touching him without his knowledge or consent and she is healed. She doesn't even ask him. There's no conversation. She just believes, touches him, and is healed.

It's like power and grace and healing are just radiating out of Jesus. Like healing power is just ready to burst forth at any time and can't be contained. And he doesn't rebuke her, he praises her for her faith.

But he is delayed and the little girl dies. Jesus didn't get there in time to heal her, the parents know she died, the people know she died so why bother Jesus any longer? He can heal, but now she's dead - it's too late.

Jesus says "No, she's not dead." She was dead, he knew that - I think he was teaching them something. But you know what he does: he raises her from the dead. He has power over life and death and life.

The miracles get bigger. The awesome power of Jesus is becoming more and more obvious. The jaw-dropping signs are more incredible. And at the end of it all, the push back against Jesus grows.

So this calming of the sea is the first of these 4 miracles that manifest even more power and glory than what the disciples have seen before.

And it comes after a long day of preaching. Jesus preached as long as the crowds would endure it. The crowds were massive, he was on a boat. We find out here that actually he was also surrounded by boats. So he's out a little ways from shore preaching to the masses on the shore, but there are other boats around him listening as well. **Read 36**

And if you remember, when the preaching is done - and it's confusing preaching because it's all in parables - then Jesus spends time with his disciples and those who want to know more about the parables. He spends a lot of time explaining the parables to them and explains why he's preaching in parables.

And although this is has been a long day the day is not over. There's more business to do. Jesus is constantly pushing to the next town, to preach to more and more. To always be about his Father's business.

Even after this long day Jesus wants to go to the other side of the lake. When Jesus was preaching he was probably in Capernaum, at 12 o'clock on the Sea of Galilee. He now wants to move to the other side of the sea. There's some debate about exactly where Jesus went because in Jesus's time many cities shared the same name or a very similar name as the Gerasenes. But where he ends up in chapter 5 is probably at about the 3 o'clock position on the Sea of Galilee.

Now, on just a simple reading there is another almost identical story in the Bible to this very one. What is it? It's the story of Jonah.

Amazingly this is almost an exact recreation of the story of Jonah. There are some differences, of course, but on the whole it is almost a retelling. **Turn back to Jonah 1** for a minute. Now, while you're turning I'm going to tell you that I don't know what to do with this connection. Most of the scholars I looked up don't really know what to do with it either. I'll make some observations at the end but the parallels are absolutely uncanny:

We've got guys in both boats who are religious but not truly sold on Yahweh. We have 2 storms that are so bad everyone believes they will die. Jonah and Jesus are somehow both asleep in what can only be described as hurricane like conditions. They are both awakened by trained sailors in a panic and both are the cause of the storm stopping. And the result of both situations is worship of the living God. And both go to preach repentance to the gentiles afterward who repent and believe.

And if you get down to the grammar and some of the exact phrases that are used in the They are almost identical stories. I know most of you know the events of Jonah, but I want to read this in light of comparing it to Mark. **Read 4-17**

Now, we could read on because if you read through Jonah's prayer in chapter 2 it's Jonah's prayer while he's in the fish. And he uses death and resurrection language as he prays to God. Jesus says that the sign he'll give to the unbelieving Pharisees is the sign of Jonah - 3 days, 3 nights in the belly of the fish. He then preaches the gospel to the gentiles who all believe. You know what the book of Jonah is pointing to? Jesus.

But back to the storm. Isn't it amazing that the men are exceedingly afraid while the storm is raging and then the storm stops what's their response? More fear. You might think they'd be happy and praising God.

But they're even more afraid now that the storm has been calmed. Why? Because know they know - like really know - that there is a God in heaven who controls the wind and the waves and boats. He sovereignly controls the most powerful forces in the universe and on our planet. He can start them and stop them instantaneously at his pleasure even while our lives hang in the balances.

There are times when we say we believe something. We say we believe that God is powerful. There are times when we say we believe God is in control of our very situation. There are times when we say we believe God knows what we're going through or testing us. And then the reality happens and we are brought face to face with God.

And that's what happened here. The sailors were religious. And I believe they were converted as a result of this situation. But their theoretical religion turned into real worship when they saw the power of God.

**Psa. 18:15:** The channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare at your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of your nostrils.

**Psalms 89:9-11:** You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them. You crushed [sea monsters] Rahab like a carcass; you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm. The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours; the world and all that is in it, you have founded them.

Our God is powerful.

And this is the interesting thing: what really floored them was the power of God's mercy. He could have drowned them in the depth of the ocean gasping for breath because of their idolatry and been perfectly just in doing so. And yet his mercy is so overwhelming it causes fear in their hearts when the waters are calm.

By the way, this reaction is true with all humans. This is why in the gospel we have to tell people of the overwhelming power of God's justice and wrath in hell forever toward sinners. It is an ocean of eternal fire like a hurricane that awaits all sinners because of our sin.

And yet for the one who believes in Jesus, the ocean of fire is replaced with the river of life and the tree of life and eternal life in the good grace of God that produces in us a different kind of fear. Not of dread [but of reverence and awe and worship.

That's what happened on that boat in the Mediterranean and that's what happened in the boat on the Sea of Galilee: the unlimited raw power of God over all things including life was met with God's all consuming grace and both situations resulted in worship.

Now, as we **turn** back to Mark there are of course some differences in these scenarios. The biggest is that whereas Jonah was running from God, Jesus is God. But it's clear he's reenacting the scenario.

Jesus even later compares himself to Jonah, like I mentioned before. But I think what Jesus is doing is saying: you know how God in heaven calmed the seas for the sailors? God's in the boat calming the seas for the disciples.

John MacArthur: The only thing more terrifying than a hurricane outside a boat is a holy God in the boat.

Now, that's just my introduction. What do we see here? I want to make 5 observations.

#### 1. The power of Jesus to make storms. Read 35-37

Now, let's be really clear: the passage nowhere says that Jesus made the storm. Let me ask you: did Jesus make the storm? Of course he did.

**Col. 1:16-17** says that by him all things are made and...through him all things hold together.

Think about storms in the Bible.

Who made the Flood that drowned the whole world? God.  
Who made the drought that forced Israel to go to Egypt? God.  
Who made the 10 plagues, including hail and darkness? God.

Don't get mad at the weatherman when it rains or snows. Every season, every gust of wind is by the providential hand of God.

We usually focus on Jesus calming the storm - he's sovereignly in control of that. But then we have to acknowledge that he's also in control of all weather. This storm wasn't an accident, it wasn't an oversight. I

believe this storm was orchestrated by Jesus on purpose just like the storm in Jonah was orchestrated by God on purpose.

We often want to attribute all the good acts of providence to God but all the hard ones are just natural. It doesn't work like that.

**Amos 3:6:** does disaster come to a city unless the Lord has done it?

**Isa. 45:7:** I form light and create darkness; I make well being and create calamity I am the Lord who does all these things.

This is the truth that causes Job to say: The Lord gives, the Lord takes, blessed be the name of the Lord.

Jesus is in control the whole time. He has set this up so the disciples will respond just like the sailors responded and they will know someone greater than Jonah is in the boat.

## 2. We see the humanity of Jesus. Read 38

Now we've already talked about the difficulty of reconciling the truth that Jesus is truly human with the truth that he is truly divine. Or we could say fully human and fully divine. He is one person with 2 natures. It's a paradox that's hard for us to wrap our brains around but here we see his humanity on full display.

The day had been so long for Jesus that he is worn to exhaustion. The preaching, the teaching, being with the crowds. Here in the boat we see the clearest evidence functionally for the humanity of Jesus. Our Lord was tired, he was exhausted.

There are some who would say that Jesus is a super human - that Jesus has strength beyond what we have. And there might be a sense in which Jesus's body is superior to ours because it is untainted by sin. But the human body, even without sin, has limits.

There was a heresy that still pops up occasionally that says Jesus wasn't fully human, that he only seemed human. This is called docetism. Doceo in Greek means to seem, and they would say that Jesus only seemed to be human. Well, if that's the case then Jesus isn't fully human and certainly not our sacrifice. But more importantly for our context: people who only seem to be human don't need to sleep.

No, Jesus is fully human. And here he is fully exhausted.

This is one of the most beautiful passages about the humanity of Jesus in the gospels. We often consider that he gave his life for us and what we mean by that is he died for us on the cross and that's true.

But Jesus gave all of his life for us. He wore himself out to love and heal and teach and serve. I think in some ways this is an example for us. We don't just serve one another when it's convenient. We serve until the job is done.

I don't think that means we need to be workaholics for the Kingdom. There's obviously time for a break and rest - that's what Jesus is doing right here and we see him get away all the time to pray and be refreshed. But we are called to serve and sometimes service is exhausting.

And Jesus is so exhausted he's out during a squall on the Sea of Galilee.

Now I just want to pause for a minute and show you what's happening.

**Map 1:** Jesus and his disciples are up on the Sea of Galilee in the north. The Sea of Galilee is over 600ft below sea level and is subject to very violent storms that can come up very quickly.

**Maps 2:** We've got the direction most people think that Jesus is traveling in the boat. Again, he probably headed to 3 o'clock on the Sea of Galilee.

**Boat:** Now in the 1980s there was a massive drought in Israel. It was the lowest the Sea of Galilee had been in a long, long time. And someone discovered this boat in the mud since there was very little water. They dated the boat to the time of Jesus. Now, this exact boat is not the boat Jesus was on. But, it's probably the type of boat most fishermen had at the time.

A small 27' boat that would hold 15 or so people fairly easily. Here's a modern day rendition.

**Boat 2:** This is a modern drawing of what most people believe their boat would have been like. The picture is taken from the ESV Study Bible - if you look at the note on **Matt. 14**.

But here we see a very simple boat. A single sail, a covering in the front for storage or sleeping and there may have been one in the back as well. When Jesus was on a cushion it may have been in a covered compartment area in the back of the boat.

In any case, this would have been very close to the type of boat that Jesus was sleeping on in the middle of the storm exhausted from his day.

This is not a massive vessel, this is a small boat that would have felt all the waves. But Jesus - fully man - is exhausted.

### 3. Fear of the disciples. Read 38

I think saying that the disciples were scared is an understatement. Most of these guys had spent a lot of time on the water. Peter, Andrew, James, John were all seasoned sailors. Some of the others might have been as well, but it appears the perfect storm has hit them. And by the way, it's probably night time by now.

It's been said that there's nothing scarier than drowning. Well add to that drowning in the middle of a lake, probably in the dark. You can't see a thing but the waves are coming over the boat so much that death is imminent. "Teacher, we are perishing." Matthew says the waves were swamping the boat. The boat is taking on so much water that the boat is sinking into the sea even as it's being tossed around.

And so they cry out to Jesus. "Don't you care that we are perishing?"

This is going to be a really pivotal moment for them. They believe Jesus is powerful. I also think some of them, to some degree, believe that Jesus is God.

But there come times in our lives where what we say we believe and what we actually believe is put to the test. They're calling on Jesus. They know he can probably do something. But he's a carpenter. And, yeah, he can heal people but what's he going to do in the storm? Well, they believe he can do something.

But here's the thing: their reaction to what he actually does shows that they underestimated his power. By a lot.

And I think the reality is that many times we're just like the disciples. We're going through some very difficult time, the waves are coming over the boat, the situation seems impossible. And we call to Jesus and we're looking for second rate help.

We know he's powerful and strong. I mean, that's why we cry out to him. But we don't really grasp the whole of just how strong he is.

To advance the metaphor: our little boat is filling up and it seems as though he doesn't care. He's asleep. Maybe he'll do something but we really don't know what.

They are afraid, just like we would be afraid. Just like we are often afraid. Why are they afraid? Jesus gets to the heart of the matter.

### 4. The faithlessness of the disciples. Read 38-40

Jesus puts his finger right on the issue, doesn't he? The disciples are afraid because they lack faith. They don't believe.

And actually Jesus indicted them pretty hard. Does he say they have little faith? No.

Have you still no faith. Ouch. And what's true for them is true for us. When we're afraid it's because we lack faith.

The storm comes and we are freaking out because we lack faith.

Maybe we don't believe that God cares or that he loves us. We don't believe this is the right time or the right thing.

Haven't we served well? And we lack faith.

That doesn't mean that we can't be troubled by something. Jesus in the Garden was troubled by what was about to happen on the cross.

But he wasn't afraid. And he calls his disciples to not be afraid.

**1 John 4:18:** there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out what? Fear.

**Rom. 8:15:** For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

If we had faith we wouldn't be afraid. Which means that when we're afraid we lack faith.

God calls us to trust him even in the hardest situations. Even in the most frustrating situations. The situations where we have no idea what God is doing or why.

Hymn:

Trust and obey, for there is no other way.

To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

What if we don't trust? Then ask God to increase your faith. Lord I believe, help my unbelief. And forgive me for my doubt.

And then you know what true faith does? It acts. It moves forward.

That's what courage is. Courage is knowing the danger, knowing the difficulty but acting in a manner that is **faithful** no matter the consequence.

We see the power of Jesus to make storms, the humanity of Jesus, fear of the disciples, the faithlessness of the disciples.

#### 5. Proper fear of God. Read 41

This question at the end is actually the point of the whole situation. Jesus does all of this to drive them to this one question: who is this that even the wind and waves obey him?

And they are filled with great fear. That is an amazing phrase. They were filled up to the top and what they were filled with was holy dread. Holy awe of Jesus.

Jesus brought them to this point on purpose.

We cannot have a proper understanding of Jesus without a proper fear of Jesus.

And I don't mean a dread and a hateful fear. No. I mean a holy, awesome reverence for his glorious might and power.

Jesus is not our homeboy, he's not our buddy, he's not bff. No Jesus is the holy God of the universe in human flesh with power to heal and cast out demons and calm the raging sea.

The disciples needed to understand that. I don't think Jesus was mad at the disciples for their lack of faith. In **Matthew 28** some of the disciples are staring at Jesus raised from the dead and they don't believe even while they are staring at them.

No, Jesus put this storm in their life in order to cause proper fear. In order to build faith in them.

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

Do you have a trial where you're afraid? Good. God is building in you faith - steadfastness - that you might be complete lacking in nothing. Able to trust him at all times, giving him all glory.

**Pray**