

“Wind & Waves; Fear & Faith”

Series: Jesus and His Gospel: Studies in Mark – Part 13

Mark 4:35-41

Introduction: Take your Bibles and turn to Mark 4, Mark chapter 4.

I am sure you have given at least some consideration to how you would prefer to die. I know that is a terrible way to start a sermon, but now I have your attention. We were not made for death – God made us to live, not die. But we all must face physical death because we have all rebelled against God and sin brings death. And so, we have all thought at one time or another about how we would like to pass from this life to the next. Some of us would like to go down in a flash of drama. Others of us would like to die peacefully in our sleep. Still others would like to simply keel over in the midst of our favorite activity. Whatever your particular penchant I can guarantee that your one requirement is quick. None of us want to suffer through a slow and painful death.

I can think of a few death experiences that would qualify as my least desired way to pass into eternity. At the top of that list would be a shipwreck in the midst of a terrible storm where you are slowly sucked into the depths of the sea. That would be a terrible way to die. Nothing strikes fear in our hearts like howling winds and crashing waves that sink a boat and suck us under gasping for air and only breathing in water.

This is what faced the disciples of Jesus in Mark 4. Let's read verses 35-41.

With each crashing wave the boat took on more water, and yet there Jesus lay, asleep in the stern. In most of the interactions between Jesus and the disciples we stand back and say – oh man, how did they not understand that. But as we read these verses we easily identify with their angst and with their indictment of our Lord. The narrative itself draws attention to the fact that Jesus was asleep in the midst of the raging storm. This is the only time in any of the Gospels where we are told that Jesus was asleep. We obviously know that he slept other times, but this is the only time that we are explicitly told that he was asleep. You can almost hear Peter's voice telling Mark about this unbelievable moment. “And so there we were, in the middle of the Sea of Galilee and out of nowhere this violent storm broke out. The gale force winds and the steep waves forced water into the boat. We did everything we could, but we soon realized there was no hope. And then I look over and there is Jesus asleep in the stern. Asleep – in the middle of our most dire moment!”

But this sleeping Jesus is soon proven to be the one with all authority even over the wind and wave. Over the next chapter of Mark's account of Jesus' life and ministry he is going to relay to us 4 miraculous encounters. This calming of the wind and wave is the first of the four and in

each miracle Jesus will overcome yet another element that threatens human life. He will miraculously push back the forces of nature, the forces of evil, the forces of physical illness, and the forces of physical death – and all of this will point to His glorious and unique power. And all of this will speak to our hearts about the trustworthiness of our Savior. We must put our faith in Jesus the Christ for He alone is worthy of our trust. This is the point of the account before us now, and this is the main point of the following three miracle accounts as well. In this particular miracle at the end of Mark 4 the account is told from the disciples' point of view and the bottom line question is – Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith? Since the point of the narrative is about faith and the trustworthiness of Christ let's make three truth statements about faith from the text.

I. Faith Demands Impossibility – vs. 37-38

- a. The first of these is that faith demands impossibility. You see, it was relatively easy for the disciples to declare their faith in Jesus while they sat on a boat near the shore listening to him teach. It was relatively easy for them to declare their faith in Jesus when they saw his authority being exercised over any number of demonic powers. It was relatively easy for the disciples to declare their faith in Jesus when things were going well, but true faith is not proven without adversity. It is within the very nature of faith that impossibility and adversity must test and prove true faith. Faith has as its core elements belief, declaration, and action.
- b. Imagine you and your good friend out hiking in the woods and as you hiked you came upon a deep ravine that was impassable, except by the rickety rope and wood step bridge that was strung from one side to the other. As you and your friend diagnose the situation you convince yourselves that it must be safe to cross on the bridge because there are no dead hikers at the bottom, and you declare to one another that the bridge is safe for you to use, but it doesn't become faith until you actually step out onto the bridge and entrust yourself to its ability to hold you. If you diagnosed it as being able and told your friend that it is able to hold you, but then you turned around and went home – you would not have exercised faith in the bridge. Faith requires that you believe something is true, which will then lead you to declare that it is true, which then will force you to act on that truth in the face of adverse and impossible situations.
- c. Because Impossibility Displays Faith
 - i. This is the nature of faith. Impossibility will bring out and display for all to see the true nature of our faith. Do we really believe the bridge will hold us or not. True faith takes those steps out onto the bridge. False faith just says it believes the bridge to be strong enough, but then turns around and looks for another humanly possible way.
 - ii. This sits at the cornerstone of the disciples' faith in God. To be a follower of Jesus meant that you would have to exercise faith in Him. You would have to believe Him to be who He claimed to be, and you would have to profess that with your mouth, and you would have to act on that truth in the face of impossible and adverse circumstances. Impossibility displays

faith. Without impossibility there is no testing of faith, and with no testing of faith there is really no faith at all.

iii. This stands at the cornerstone of your faith in God for eternal life. You had to understand the impossibility of your situation – that you were dead in trespasses and sins against God and that you were deserving of the eternal condemnation of God because of this sin. You had no hope or answer or solution or way out of this problem on your own. You could not build a bridge across the ravine between you and God that your sin created. It was an impossible situation that God met with His solution through Jesus Christ. As 1 Peter 3:18 says:

1. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, (1Pe 3:18 ESV)

iv. But the unrighteous are not brought to God universally. Faith is required. We must believe the truths of the word about our sin, about Jesus, and about the salvation he offers, and then we must act on that faith by ceasing all efforts to save ourselves and entrusting our eternity to the finished work of Jesus Christ. The impossibility of saving ourselves forces the crisis of faith where we must decide – Is Jesus enough or not? Can He save me or can't he? Has he truly paid for all my sins? Can I find forgiveness in Him? Has he provided the way?

v. Without the impossibility of our sinful condition and our sure condemnation to an eternity apart from God we would not ever know the true nature of our faith. But the crisis of sin puts the nature of our faith on display. This carries through then to the rest of our journey in following Christ Jesus in this life. If we have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb by grace through faith, then we will be continuously presented with tests of our faith in which humanly impossible situations will examine our faith in God. This is the nature of faith – to exercise it we need to be confronted with the impossible – and that is what we see happening in Mark 4 on the Sea of Galilee. The impossibility of the situation is testing the nature of the disciples' faith. Faith demands impossibility, for without impossibility faith is never proven.

d. Because Adversity Distorts God's Love

i. Faith also demands impossibility because adversity distorts God's love. So in Mark 4 the wind is howling and the waves are crashing and the disciples are legitimately scared. It truly looked like they were going to drown because of this storm. Remember that at least four of these men were fishermen on this very lake their whole lives. They grew up in a boat on this very lake, and they were terrified in the midst of this storm. This was no child's play of a storm. They were seriously in danger and were convinced that death was imminent. And they look to their teacher who had proven himself to be so capable of handling tough situations for people. He had cast out demons, healed a man with a withered hand,

made a paralytic to walk again, cleansed a leper, and healed many others. But the disciples had never seen him display authority over a storm. They were scared and in need of Jesus to save them . . . and there he is, asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat. How could he possibly be sleeping? How, when they needed him most could he be so disinterested in their peril? They had obeyed his command to set sail for the other side of the lake and look where their obedience landed them! Smack in the middle of the worst storm they had ever seen, about to drown in the depths of the sea.

- ii. And so their reaction to these realities is to indict Jesus. Teacher – do you not care that we are perishing? The adversity of the situation had distorted their view of Jesus, which ties into the true nature of their faith. The adversity of strong wind and capsizing waves coupled with the reality of a sleeping Savior made known that they didn't really trust in Jesus. Their adversity was not being tended to by Jesus right at that moment and so they concluded he must not care for them. This is what adversity brings to the forefront of our spiritual consciousness. In those most difficult of moments it seems as though God is absent, uncaring, and uninterested simply because he is not right in the moment changing the circumstance to be whatever we think it should be. God often appears to us to be distant and so our perspective of his love is distorted. He must not love us as he said he does because he seems asleep in the stern! He isn't changing my job situation right now, so he must not love me. He isn't curing this disease right now so he must not love me. He let my loved one die so he must not love me. He isn't meeting my financial need like I thought so he must not love me.
- iii. Adoniram Judson was the first foreign missionary sent from America, and he too felt the distance of God in the midst of terrible adversity which subsequently distorted his view of God's love. His baby Maria died just months after his wife's death. In the face of unimaginable adversity he experienced wave after wave of spiritual despair and he lamented, "God is to me the great Unknown. I believe in him but I find him not."¹
- iv. How easy it is for our soul's to indict God when he doesn't act to resolve our affliction like we think he should! How easy it is for us to see in our adversity a lack of God's love! But so often, as is the case here in Mark 4, it is the most loving thing God can do. Put us in a situation where we have no way out and certain harm is closing in around us. In the face of this adversity we will certainly see our true view of God – whether it is right or it is skewed – which will then make known the true nature of our faith in this God. Faith demands impossibility and adversity, for it is in the crucible of impossibility and adversity that the true nature of our faith is proven.

¹ As quoted in David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark*, pg. 199-200.

II. Faith & Fear are Converse Realities – vs. 40

- a. This text also makes known to us that faith and fear are converse realities. In verse 39 Jesus awoke at the behest of the disciples and rebuked the wind and the wave with two powerful words of command. His commanded words were met with instant obedience by the wind and wave. Unlike the unruly two year old who must be told hundreds of times to stop, the wind and wave are told once by the powerful God-man – Silence! Be Still! – and they obeyed completely. The wind ceased and there was a great calm. No wind and no wave instantaneous to the command of Jesus. After rebuking the wind and wave with strong words of command, he turns to gently rebuke the disciples with two piercing questions. Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?
- b. And it is here that we see the nature of fear and faith and how they interplay. Jesus' two questions are meant to pierce their heart and show them the nature of the problem. After reading verses 38-39 we would be tempted to believe that the stinging indictment of the Lord by the disciples was successful and would therefore provide a pattern for us in getting God to act on our behalf. But Jesus quickly makes known through these two questions that there is a problem here. *They are fearful because they are faithless, and because they lack faith they are full of fear.* They have indicted the Lord as uncaring because they have not placed unhindered faith in Him. Notice that the problem here is not that they woke him up. He is not concerned with them interrupting his nap, nor is he concerned about them looking to him to fix the problem. Rather, he is concerned that they are full of fear and therefore absent of faith.
- c. This makes known to us an important principle about faith. The opposite heart expression of faith is fear. If our hearts are filled with fear then we are not exercising faith. If we are exercising faith then we are fighting back against fear. They do not co-exist. Faith and fear do not play nice together. They are converse realities of the heart. They are like water and oil, K-state fans and KU fans, light and darkness – they just don't go together.
- d. They don't go together because fear wells up in your heart when you are not trusting God. Fear is the product of a lack of faith. Fear is a declaration from my heart that it has no anchor and no refuge. Fear is the emotional fruit of an unsettled and unsure heart. Fear rises up as a defense mechanism to get us to act in order to preserve something important and special to us. In that basic sense it is healthy because fear alarms us as to when and where attention is needed. But fear quickly takes over in unreasonable and illogical ways when settled faith in God is absent. Our heart inherently knows that when adversity and impossibility are before us that we need help and hope and a solution. Just like the disciples we know that we can't fix it ourselves and at that moment the nature of our faith will be seen. If we truly believe God to be all that we proclaim him to be, then we will step out on the bridge crossing the ravine – entrusting ourselves to His care. But if we don't really believe Him to be who He says He is, even if we say we believe it, then we will not put our foot on the bridge and begin to cross the

ravine. We will turn back and look for another way. Instead of faith our hearts will be filled with fear. For fear and faith are converse realities.

III. Fear of God Predisposes Faith – vs. 41

- a. The last principle we find in this text about faith is that the fear of God predisposes faith. After Jesus asks his two heart piercing questions verse 41 tells us that the disciples were filled with even more fear and this time they ask the question – who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? Their fear was no longer a fear of the storm, but now they feared the Lord Jesus. He had just been sleeping and they were sure they were dying, but within a matter of moments the sea was calm and the wind had stopped blowing – and it had all happened because this man Jesus had gotten up off of the cushion and rebuked the wind and wave with 2 words of command. They were amazed by this glorious and authoritative display.
- b. It is easy to read this verse and think – you know, they should know better by now that Jesus can do these things? Don't they get it that He is the Messiah and that this means he has all authority over all things? And yet, as they followed Christ, each new experience of this authority brought out a new level of amazement from these disciples. This is due less to their dullness of faith and more to the brightening display of the glory and power of this God-man. He was true flesh and blood. He needed to sleep when he was tired, and he grew so weary that he could sleep through the most violent storm. And yet, he could stand up and say "Peace, Be Still" and the wind and waves would immediately obey. I think we would be filled with great fear as well! We too would ask this question – what kind of a man is this – who is he?
- c. And it is at this point that we see the seedlings of true and authentic faith. An accurate concept of God will produce heart dependence upon God in the face of the impossible and the adverse. The fear that rose up in the disciples' hearts in the face of the storm was illogical and unreasonable. They had the Creator of the Universe with them in the boat. He was asleep on a cushion, but he was in the boat. He had told them to go over to the other side. They were obeying His direct will, and there was no wind or wave that was going to stop them. The disciples turned to the Lord and indicted him for not caring for them because they had a skewed view of who he was. They were not yet completely sold on who this Jesus really was. They were sure he was the Messiah, but they didn't yet know all of what that meant. And here in this instance of him calming the wind and the wave they learned a bit more. The Messiah even has authority over all natural elements and each element must obey His every word. Had they understood this before they pushed off from shore they would have gently nudged the Lord awake and said – Master, we hate to wake you up, but this storm is bigger than us and we won't make it to the other side if you don't calm it down. Because you are the Master of all things can you please tell this storm to be calm?
- d. If only they had understood this. You see, a right view of God predisposes faith. You will not entrust yourself to be saved out of a situation if you do not understand the object of your trust to be able to save you. So, imagine an

apartment fire where someone is trapped on the third floor of a building. As the flames grow more intense the trapped man moves to the outside balcony and screams for help. A group of people form on the ground below and try to convince the man to jump and together they will try to catch him. Convinced that his flailing body would be impossible for them to catch the man does not jump. But then the fire trucks arrive and get a ladder stretched out to the balcony and the man willingly takes the firefighters hand and steps onto the ladder. What made the difference? Why trust the fire truck ladder and not the crowd of people? Because he was convinced that one actually had the ability to save him and the other didn't. Now that the disciples are convinced of Jesus' authority over storm and sea, they have the seedlings of faith. The fear of God predisposes us to faith in Him. It does not guarantee faith in him, as we will see with these very men. They will doubt again and he will have to gently rebuke them again, but that doesn't lessen the principle. An authentic understanding of God will predispose us to putting our faith in Him.

- e. One of the most common commands in Scripture is – Do not fear. Why is that? Why has God told us over and over and over again – Do not fear? He has done this because fear in the face of adverse circumstance is a declaration of our hearts that we don't trust Him. When we fear in the face of these most difficult realities we are saying that God is unable to meet our challenge and therefore he is unworthy of our dependence. This strikes at the heart of our faith in God. If He is truly God, if he is truly who He says He is in this book, if He never changes, if he is in complete control, if He is love and He is good, then no matter the storm, and no matter the certainty of my doom, I will not fear! If we fear God we will be predisposed to placing our faith in Him. If we fear our circumstances we are declaring that our hearts have determined God to be unworthy of our trust and dependence.

IV. Application:

- a. So, if these three principles about faith are true, then how do they carry over into our lives? If it is true that Faith demands the impossible, and that faith and fear are converse realities, and that the fear of God predisposes us to authentic faith, then how do we see this played out on the tapestry of life? Certainly we identify with the disciples in the boat. Certainly we understand their fear and don't have to think too long about circumstances that cause our hearts to tremble. So, how do we live out these principles of faith in our life?
- b. Work Backwards
 - i. One of the hardest things about faith is that it seems undefinable in the experience of life. So, it seems easy to say to others that we are just trusting in the Lord, but are we really? In the face of that adverse circumstance that presents us with impossibly difficult realities, are we really trusting in God like we ought, or are we like the disciples – full of fear and lacking in faith because we are sure that God is asleep in the stern of the boat?

- ii. One of the tangible ways to answer this question is to work backwards. Instead of looking for faith, look for fear. Where is it that you smell fear in your heart? What circumstances or possibilities of circumstances cause your heart to panic and fear? Where does anxiety creep up in your soul? What circumstance or person or conversation forces you to look for ways out so that you no longer have to face the difficulty and the pain? Identify those problems and trace them backwards to your heart. So, let's just say that you fear where our country is headed. So much so that when you hear the news you can feel the anxiety and the panic rise in your soul. As you identify this fear that is driven by circumstance, ask yourself – what is it that is making me afraid? Why am I fearful in the face of this impossible or adverse circumstance? You may say, well, I am fearful because our country is becoming more and more godless every day, and it honestly seems like God is asleep in the stern. You are fearful because you have kids and grandkids that are going to have to grow up in a godless culture and you fear that they will succumb to the temptations of this world and walk away from God.
 - iii. Now, once you have identified what it is that causes your fear – examine Jesus' relationship to this circumstance. Is he Lord over it? Does he have dominion over that circumstance that is causing you fear? Can he exercise power and control over it in any way He so chooses? Can you? Since you can't and he can, the logical result is increased faith, and this takes work. In the face of your fear you must seek a correct concept of God so that you can exercise faith in Him, moment by moment if necessary. As you make these links between your fear and your lack of faith, you must then pursue faith by pursuing God. You must see where it is that your view of God is deficient and you must seek to bolster this through a pursuit of God in His Word. The believer in Jesus Christ has no reason to fear, and where fear is present, faith is not.
- c. Count it all Joy
- i. Since it is true then that faith demands impossibility – when you are presented with impossibility and adversity – count it all joy! How easy it is for us to buckle on our spiritual seatbelts and simply hang on for the ride. Like a terrifying roller coaster ride we just white knuckle through it and wait for it be done. How prone our hearts are to simply endure the pains of life. How often we pray for God to remove them so that life will be simpler and easier. And yet, as James 1 says – we should count it all joy when we meet trial of various kinds, because true faith will show itself to be true in the face of the impossible and the adverse. Every trial is an opportunity for fear or for faith, and for those of us serious about following our Lord Jesus, it is obvious that faith is essential. Therefore every trial, every impossible circumstance, every adverse reality in life presents us with a moment to test our faith and grow it into an ever stronger muscle. Count it all joy!

- ii. So my brothers and sisters, it is not enough to profess faith in God. It is not enough to tell others that we are just trusting God as we face the next round of trial. We must step out on the bridge and walk across – counting the Lord of Heaven faithful and powerful and worthy of our trust!

As we close let me just give you kind of a litmus test of faith and fear that will hopefully help you discern how you are responding to the trials the Lord brings.

- If you are so overwhelmed by the impossibility of the circumstance so that you indict God because He seems absent – then you are probably full of fear, not faith.
- If you are focused on all that God is not doing in your situation – then you are full of fear and not faith.
- If your trial is forcing you to the Word more and more because you need God more than ever – then you are probably full of faith and not fear.
- If you are prayerless, then you are probably full of fear. In other words, if you talk to others quicker and more often than you talk to the God of Heaven about the problem then you are probably full of fear. Prayer is the base expression of trust in God. By its very action it is a declaration of my inability and of God's ability – and this is faith. If you are not praying then you are succumbing to your own fear.
- If you are carefully and soberly responding to your trial with joy because it is providing you with a chance to see the true nature of your faith in God – then you are full of faith and not fear.

Is your heart full of fear or full of faith? Let's pray!

Benediction: Hebrews 13:20-21