

*Faith and Fear: Mark 4:35-41*  
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This morning we're going to consider the relationship between faith and fear. We're going to look at a very famous event in the life of Jesus, when He miraculously calmed a storm. And in Mark's account of this event we're going to learn some important things about faith and fear.

Let me start by asking each of you: What are you afraid of? Some of you might say, I'm not afraid of anything. No fear. Maybe you even have the bumper sticker to prove it. Others of you, who are more honest, might say, I'm afraid of dying. I'm afraid of losing my spouse. I'm afraid of losing a loved one. I'm afraid of sickness. I'm afraid that some kind of accident will occur that will bring all kinds of pain and hardship into my life. I'm fearful because of my financial situation. I'm fearful because of my job situation. Or maybe you have fears that are of a different nature. Maybe you would say, I live in constant fear of what people are going to think of me. I'm afraid of people not liking me. Or, I'm afraid of this or that relationship changing in a way that I don't want it to change. I'm afraid that my friend is going to become friends with someone else and then not be as close to me anymore.

There are all kinds of fears that flood into our minds at various times. The related question, then, as we'll observe in the text, is the question of faith. What or whom are you trusting in? What is your hope? What is your treasure? What we fear will be a very good indicator of what we believe. The fears of our hearts will reveal the idols of our hearts. If you are gripped with a paralyzing fear of sickness, then you have probably made an idol out of health. If you find yourself living in terrifying fear of gaining weight, or your figure changing, then you probably have an issue with vanity. You have made an idol out of superficial beauty. If you find yourself lying awake at night fretting about money, wondering if you'll be able to get all the material things you want, then you have been seduced by the deceitfulness of riches.

And what does this say about our faith? It says that our faith is in health or our appearance or possessions or comfort. If our main fears have to do with the possibility of losing health or wealth or prosperity or prestige or power or possessions, then those are the things we're putting our faith in. Those are the idols of our hearts, the things we're banking our hope on, the things we're looking to for ultimate satisfaction.

There is a great fear, though, that drives out every other fear. And it corresponds to a treasure that is more satisfying than any other pleasure. It is the fear of the Lord. It is a reverent fear, a holy fear, a joyful fear that trembles in the presence of the Almighty God—a reverent awe that renders one speechless in view of the majestic beauty of God’s glory.

In this amazing story of Jesus calming a storm, we’re going to see faith and fear. We’re going to see Jesus as a profound model of faith that erases fear. We’ll see the disciples full of fear, which shows their lack of faith. And we’ll see the authority of Jesus displayed in a way that should create an appropriate fear of Him and faith in Him and delight in Him.

Here’s how I’ll summarize the four points of this message as we walk through these verses. First, asleep in the storm. Second, afraid of the storm. Third, authority over the storm. And fourth, afraid after the storm.

Verse 35 begins, “On that day,” which refers back to the beginning of chapter 4. You remember, Jesus was teaching beside the sea. And the crowd was so large that He got into a boat and spoke to the crowd from the boat. Well, it’s now evening of that day, and He says to His disciples, “Let us go across to the other side.” And next week we’ll look at what happens on the other side. It was a whole different world over there on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. The western side of the Sea, where Jesus has been up to this point, was a Jewish area. But the eastern side of the Sea was the Gentile Decapolis. And Jesus is heading into a very messy situation, a situation that highlights the ceremonial uncleanness of the Gentiles. Jesus went to the other side to show His compassion for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. He wasn’t just going to get some time away. He was continuing to be motivated by what He said in 1:38, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.”

So that’s what they did. Verse 36 says they left the crowd and the disciples took Him with them in the boat, *just as He was*, meaning He was in the boat teaching the crowd, and He just sat down in that very boat and they headed out on their journey to the other side.

At the end of verse 36 Mark adds that other boats were with Him. So there must have been a larger group of disciples that followed Him, at least initially. These other boats aren’t mentioned again in the story. This detail, though, reminds us that we’re getting an eyewitness account here. There’s good reason to believe that Mark wrote this Gospel based on the eyewitness testimony of none other than Simon Peter. And we certainly see details here that would only come from someone who was on the inside of this event, someone who was part of this experience. He

mentions that it was evening, and that they took him in the boat, *just as He was*, and that there were other boats as well, and that Jesus slept *on the cushion*. There's also a very vivid description of the storm, with the waves breaking into the boat, and the boat filling with water. So we're reading here an eyewitness account of this event.

It is not at all surprising to read of a storm on the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is a very unique spot that seems to be specially designed for abrupt and fierce storms. It is the lowest fresh water lake on earth. The Dead Sea is even lower in elevation, but it is salt water. The Sea of Galilee, the lowest fresh water lake, is about 700 feet *below* sea level. And it's surrounded by hills and mountains, particularly on the eastern side of it. Mt. Hermon is 30 miles northeast, and it has an elevation of 9,200 feet above sea level. Now, I'm no meteorologist, but I can understand a little bit of how the cold air from these high mountains can sweep down and mix with the warm air in the deep bowl of the Sea of Galilee, and create quite a stir. And that's what happened on this night. An unexpected and violent storm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling.

### **Asleep in the Storm**

This is quite an event. But what makes it all the more dramatic is the fact that Jesus is sleeping in the middle of this storm. And this is the first main point for us to observe here. Jesus is asleep in the storm. What's the significance of this? I think it points both to a very practical reality as well as a profound theological truth. The practical reality is that Jesus is not only fully God, but fully man. And this is a picture of His humanity. He's worn out as a result of His ministry. He has been teaching and preaching and healing and casting out demons and the crowds have been following Him. On this particular day He had been speaking to such a large crowd that He had to get into a boat just to create some distance between Himself and the crowd. And now He is utterly exhausted. And He falls into such a deep sleep that He is still sleeping as the waves are crashing over the sides of the boat.

But at the same time this is a profound picture of faith in the midst of the storm. Interestingly, the only place where the Gospels mention Jesus sleeping is in a storm, which is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke. It was certainly noteworthy that Jesus slept in the middle of a storm. As we look at the context here in Mark 4 we remember that in verses 26-27 the farmer scattered seed on the ground and then went to sleep. Do you remember that from last week—the parable of the growing seed? Verse 27 says, “He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he

knows not how.” And what a beautiful picture that is of faith! We are to faithfully sow the seed of God’s Word, and then we are to rest in God, trust in God, have faith that He will work and accomplish His purposes. So we have that image of sleep in the close context of this passage.

And then if we go to the Old Testament, and especially the Psalms, we see some interesting things about sleep as well, which shed some light on this event. In Leviticus 26:6, where there is a description of the blessings of obedience, the Lord says to the people, “I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid.” There’s a connection there between peace and lying down, and that is contrasted with fear. Proverbs 3:21-26 makes a similar point, with similar wording. It exhorts us to “keep sound wisdom and discretion” and “Then you will walk on your way securely, and your foot will not stumble. *If you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.* Do not be afraid of sudden terror or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes, for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught.” Again, sleep is contrasted with fear.

Now let me read you some verses from the Psalms. In Psalm 3 David is writing from the experience of Absalom’s rebellion (2 Samuel 15-16). David’s own son, Absalom, conspired to take over the kingdom, and David had to flee Jerusalem. It was quite a storm. And listen to what David said about it in Psalm 3:1-6, “O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God. But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head. I cried aloud to the Lord, and he answered me from his holy hill. *I lay down and slept*; I woke again, for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around.” Can you picture this? David’s enemies are all around him, and he is able to lie down and sleep. Why? Because he is trusting in God and crying out to God to help him. Psalm 4:8 is a similar statement, “In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.”

What we’re seeing in Mark 4 is a vivid illustration and a perfect illustration of this truth. Jesus Christ is a model for us here of what perfect trust looks like. Jesus is the object of our faith—He is the One we are to trust in. But He is also a model of faith—we are to trust like He trusts. Throughout Jesus’ life and ministry He demonstrated a perfect trust in His Father, which is seen in His perfect obedience to the Father. This is why we should pray to become more and more like Christ, which is what we pray for when we pray for sanctification. We want to be conformed to the

image of our Savior. We want that kind of faith and that kind of obedience.

Jesus asleep in the storm is a perfect picture of perfect trust. The storm is raging all around, and Jesus is unafraid. There is not even a hint of fear. There is no worry, no anxiety, no fretting, no panic. He is perfectly at peace. He is lying down, enjoying sweet sleep.

In the Old Testament there was another man who slept in the middle of a storm, although the circumstances were quite different. Jonah was on a boat in the middle of a great storm, and there are some striking similarities between the two stories. Jesus and Jonah were both asleep in a storm, a most remarkable thing in both cases. Both were awakened and rebuked for sleeping in the storm. And in both cases the storm ceased and those on the boat were delivered. There are some key differences, though. Jesus' sleep is a picture of faith and obedience. Jonah's sleep is a picture of apathy and rebellion. Jesus was obeying the Father perfectly and demonstrating a deep trust in Him. Jonah was acting in rebellion, running from God.

And in Jonah's case, he had to be sacrificed in order for the sailors to be saved. They had to throw him overboard before the sea would stop raging. In the storm on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus didn't throw Himself into the water, but He was preparing to throw Himself into a storm much greater than that. He subjected Himself to the storm of God's wrath against sin, a storm that is infinitely more devastating and intense than anything produced by wind and water. Jesus, Himself, made this connection between Himself and Jonah when He said in Matthew 12:40-41, "For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days in the heart of the earth." And He said, "something greater than Jonah is here."

All of these biblical connections help us to see Jesus as both the object of our faith and model for our faith. He is the object of our faith because He sacrificed Himself for us in order to rescue us from the storm of God's wrath. And He spent three days in the heart of the earth, just like Jonah spent three days in the belly of the fish. But, being greater than Jonah, Jesus accomplished something glorious: the salvation of sinners. All who trust in Him will be saved. As we turn away from our idols and let go of our fears and instead rest in Him, we will be rescued from the ultimate storm. We will be shielded from God's punishment and instead receive eternal life. And Jesus is also the supreme model of faith as He sleeps in the storm. This is the kind of trust we should have in Him.

### **Afraid of the Storm**

In contrast to Jesus' peaceful sleep in the storm, the disciples were afraid. They were afraid of the storm, and this is our second main point. Now, these guys were experienced fishermen. They were familiar with the Sea of Galilee. They knew the kinds of storms it could produce. And undoubtedly they had their stories of fierce storms they had experienced in the past. But apparently they had not experienced anything quite like this before. We should not miss the irony of this scene. Experienced sailors in a boat in a storm are turning to a carpenter for help. But they were crying to Him for help because they knew He was much more than a carpenter. They didn't yet comprehend exactly who He was, but they knew He had supernatural authority and power.

In the middle of verse 38 we read about their reaction to this storm. "And they woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?'" This was a pretty rude way for them to speak to Jesus. They made it seem like Jesus was stupid and ignorant and negligent. But this just reveals their lack of faith. The fear that filled their minds and hearts at that moment was evidence that faith was absent. If they had faith in Jesus, they would not have been afraid.

I think it's a helpful thing to point out that just because these men were with Jesus did not mean they bypassed the storm. They were in the same boat with Jesus, and they found themselves in the middle of a fierce storm. Remember that the next time you find yourself in the middle of one of life's storm. Or if you're in one of those storms right now, be reminded of this. Just because you're in a storm doesn't mean Jesus is not with you. And just because Jesus is with you doesn't mean you're exempt from the storms. Jesus is with His disciples in the storm. And that's the experience of the Christian life. We need to be prepared for suffering. We need to be ready to go through the storm with Jesus in the boat with us. It's like the song we sing at vacation Bible school with the kids: with Jesus in my boat, I can smile in the storm. That's not just a cute kid's song. That's rock-solid biblical truth that we need to cling to. With Jesus in the boat with us, that doesn't mean it's always going to be smooth sailing. But it does mean that He's with us, and therefore we need not fear but have faith in Him. We shouldn't be like these disciples who were filled with fear. Instead we should be filled with faith.

### **Authority over the Storm**

The next thing we see in the story is Jesus' authority over the storm. Jesus was very patient with these men, as He is patient with us. The disciples had spoken to Him rudely and disrespectfully. But Jesus still responded to their cry for help.

Verse 39 says “he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’” We’ve already seen Jesus’ authority over sickness and His authority over demons. Now we see that He also has authority over the wind and the sea. He has power over nature, and this reveals His divine identity.

Psalms 107 tells of sailors caught in a storm. And when their courage melted away it says, “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” (vv. 28-29). God controls the storms. He forms them, and He calms them. Therefore, to see Jesus calm a storm is a clear pointer to the fact that He is God.

The word “great” shows up three times in this passage in Mark. The first is in verse 37, “a great windstorm.” The second is in verse 39, “a great calm.” Jesus supernaturally made a great calm out of a great storm. It’s not only amazing that the wind stopped immediately, but there was also a great calm. The waves that had been breaking into the boat disappeared. The water that had been rising and falling and splashing this way and that way was now perfectly placid. This was a miracle. It was not a coincidence. It was not just a storm that happened to form quickly and then dissipate quickly. Think about it. Even if the wind died down all of a sudden, the waves would continue to rise and fall for quite some time. It would be the next morning before someone could say that there was a great calm. But this happened instantly.

The image that comes to my mind is a lake early in the morning before any of the fishing boats or ski boats or jet skis have gotten out on the water. Growing up in Michigan, we went on vacations to the lake. And when Stacy and I lived in Minneapolis we were in the land of 10,000 lakes. And I love to look out on a lake early in the morning and enjoy the peacefulness and beauty of a large body of water that looks as though it is a piece of glass. That’s what the great calm would have been like.

Imagine the disciples taking in this miracle. Seconds earlier they were fearing for their lives. The boat was taking in water. The waves were hitting them from every direction. And instantaneously, at the command of Jesus, there was no more wind and the water was like glass. This is Jesus’ authority over the storm.

### **Afraid after the Storm**

The last thing we have to see in this story is that the disciples were afraid after the storm. They had been afraid of storm, but now they’re afraid again after the storm. And this is a different kind of fear.

In verse 40, Jesus rebukes them for their lack of faith. And do you see again the contrast between fear and faith? “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” In other words, if you had faith you wouldn’t be afraid. But your fear shows your lack of faith. Now, remember, these guys are the insiders. These are the ones Jesus was explaining the parables to. He didn’t explain the parables to those on the outside, but He did explain the parables to these disciples. But even they still don’t get it. They have been drawn to Jesus, and they are following Him. But they still don’t know exactly who He is, and they still lack faith. This shows us that the disciples were not disciples because of their superior intellect or wisdom or spiritual insight or because of their superior commitment to Jesus. Rather, they were disciples because of Jesus’ commitment to them. Jesus chose them and called them to Himself and was patient with them even when they were afraid, even when they were hard-hearted. And the same is true of Jesus’ disciples today. He chooses, He calls, and He remains committed to those He has made His own.

In verse 41 we see the fear that comes after the storm. Here is the third use of the word “great” in these verses. “And they were filled with a great fear.” The wording in the Greek is very emphatic. Literally it says, “they feared a great fear.” This is different than the fear they experienced in the midst of the storm. This is a whole new fear, a deeper fear. It’s articulated in the unanswered question at the end of verse 41, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

You see, the only thing more terrifying than a storm all around your boat is the unexpected realization that God is inside your boat. It is not a light thing to be in the presence of God. It’s a weighty thing, and it creates a fear that is different and deeper than any other fear.

Who then is this? That’s a question I hope you’ll ponder. Maybe you came here today wondering about that very question. Who is Jesus? The point of Mark’s gospel is to show who He is. He is the Christ, the Son of God. His ability to command the wind and sea shows that He is divine. This is a revelation of His identity.

And so we come back to the point that I talked about at the beginning of this message, and the point we’ve been seeing throughout this passage, that the fear of the Lord will drive out every other fear. There is this relationship between faith and fear. Where we lack faith in Jesus, we will have many fears. We will be afraid of the storms of life. But when we trust Him and fear Him as we should, we will fear nothing else. We will be like Jesus, who slept peacefully in the middle of the storm.

So I ask you again. What are the fears in your life? How do those fears reveal the idols of your heart? Are you trusting the Lord, fearing the Lord? Or are you living in constant fear and anxiety because of the storms of life?

When the Lord saved the Israelites from Egypt, the people feared and believed. Exodus 14:31 says, "Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses." My hope for us is that we will see the Lord for who He is and see the mighty salvation He has accomplished for us, and that we will fear Him and believe in Him. And I pray that our fear of Him and faith in Him will drive out every other fear in our hearts.