

TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

MARK: KINGDOM POWER FOSTERING FAITH

MARK 4.35-41

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1. Last time we talked about How the Kingdom Comes. We saw that it comes slowly and quietly, mysteriously and with hiddenness. It's time to point out that none of that means the kingdom lacks power. The kingdom could come with force and violence if God wished; God's power certainly isn't lacking for such a demonstration. And in fact, there are a few times through the Gospels where, when alone with his disciples, Jesus allows a brief vision of that kingdom power.

2. That's what we're going to see today. One writer notes that with today's text Jesus raises the stakes considerably. We've seen Jesus exercise power thus far but the text today concerns power of a different order. Remember back there at the beginning of Mark how Jesus' authority quickly became a live issue? He had authority over demons and Scripture and forgiveness of sins? Well, that's not all. Jesus' authority reaches further still, as we'll see today.

3. We're going to witness great power in today's text but we must be warned, witnessing power of this sort comes with a cost. You see, when God displays divine power and authority through Jesus, that display comes with expectations. Part of my goal today is to focus in on one of those expectations. Put it another way: If God grants you the free gift of insight into the Person of Jesus Christ, at the very same time he makes you obligated. Or let's say he increases your obligation. Now what is this obligation? It's obvious we already owe God everything we have.

4. Let's zero in on one thing we have which we are obligated to give to God, and all the more as we are granted insight into the Gospel: Confidence. We have confidence, or faith, or trust. We have it, and God wants it. God is owed it by virtue of his position as our Creator. And with every fresh insight into God's redemption

God makes us even more obligated to give to him, without reservation, every square inch of it.

5. So today let's do two things. First, let's walk through the text. Second, let's dwell a while on our obligation to trust God based on his revealing of Gospel insight.

THE TEXT

1. Mark tells us that on the same day Jesus was speaking in parables to the crowd it got late and Jesus decided to cross Lake Galilee, which is 8 miles wide by 13 miles long. Possibly Jesus has had enough of the crowds for one day and the Lake provides a convenient means of escape; or its possible Jesus knows he has an important encounter coming on the other side of the lake, which we'll see next week.

2. Now recall that at the beginning of this chapter Jesus sat in a boat in order to preach; that gave him space from the crowds which were liable to crush him. It looks like the disciples just jumped in the same boat and they all headed off together. Mark tells us other boats accompanied them but we don't know how far, or if these other boats witnessed what happens out on the lake. Nothing more is said about them.

3. Now the terrain around Lake Galilee is set up just right to make storms on the Lake common. One writer mentions that these storms usually occur morning and afternoon, but when they do happen at evening or night time they are especially dangerous. Jesus and the 12 are out on the Lake somewhere when one of these storms starts.

4. The fishing boat probably only fits 15 people; this isn't a big ship that can withstand a sea-storm. The sides of the boat likely were about 4 feet high so waves coming over the side would quickly fill the boat. If the boat goes down these guys are going to have at least a couple miles to swim either way, and that's in the middle of a sea-storm. In other words, they are going to die a watery death.

5. In the back of these fishing boats they placed a cushion for anyone in the boat **who wasn't either rowing** or fishing; Jesus is there in the back catching a few winks, probably exhausted after a long day of preaching and healing. I say "probably exhausted" because people sleeping in a fishing boat in the middle of a sea storm tend to wake up. On the other hand, we are very possibly witnessing the faith of Jesus Christ in action. I mean the faith which Jesus himself possesses, which Jesus himself exercises toward God. Even the approach of certain death doesn't scare him; far from it, Jesus lays himself down and sleeps like a baby as death comes on!

6. Well that might impress us, but that's just because it isn't our lives presently threatened by the storm. The disciples, on the other hand, are not so awed by the restful faith of Jesus. They're terrified out of their minds! Their language expresses that they believe they are in process of drowning as they speak. That's how close they came to sinking.

7. And so they go to Jesus and wake him with a rebuke. And Yes, it was a rebuke. The commentators make it clear that the language used here is not a gentle request for help; this is a reproach, an accusation, an incredulous complaint. This is a rude outburst unworthy of the Son of God. Frankly, you would be embarrassed if Jesus were in the room and someone spoke to him this way. You would feel indignant and rush to the defense of his honor.

8. Their rebuke of Jesus implies he is ignorant of their need, and worse, that he doesn't care at all! Some Master and Savior you are! Some Messiah you're turning out to be! We're a few minutes from sleeping with the fish and you're sleeping in the stern! Hop to it! You want to be a Savior? Get to saving!

9. Well, lucky for us Jesus is a humble Savior and he bears with our stupidity and monstrous unbelief, our miserable wretchedness. So Jesus gets up and stills the storm.

10. Now the way he stills the storm is interesting. If we didn't know better we'd have to say he was treating the storm like a Person. Mark says Jesus rebukes the wind; but of course we don't rebuke inanimate objects (or at least you shouldn't). And he talks to the sea like it was an excited dog that won't stop barking, or maybe a crying baby. So what's going on here?

11. Some have suggested Jesus recognizes demonic influence behind the storm. There's merit in that idea since the words used here do occur also in places where Jesus casts out demons. So it's possible that's the answer.

12. I'll suggest something else to you. Remember that Mark's purpose is to increasingly present Jesus to us as Son of God. But to be the Son of God is to be a supernatural person come from outside the world; and He is the Creator of that world. Jesus has an intimate relationship with that wind and those waves because he made them and sustains them. Sinful men forget their Creator all the time, but let me suggest the wind and waves do not.

13. You know I've noticed something interesting between my kids and me. Take Carson. Suppose Carson is on the other side of the room, playing with other kids or intent on something else he's doing. Now imagine I look in his direction while his attention is elsewhere. And I keep looking right at him. Eventually Carson's gaze will scan the room for whatever reason, and when he sees me, and he sees that I'm looking at him, he stops scanning and locks onto my gaze.

14. And he gets this look in his eyes like he's waiting for directions. Or like he's checking just to see if I'm looking at him because I have directions. Now do you know why he does that, without even thinking? Because He and I have 8 years of relationship together, consisting of care, provision, and authoritative command. That whole 8 years is behind my look in his direction, and his corresponding lock onto my gaze.

15. Now here's what I'm saying: I think the reason Jesus talks to the elements like he knows them personally is because he knows them personally. When Jesus turns to the wind and waves and gives command, behind his command is 10,000 years of relationship between himself and nature. Nature scans the room and sees her master looking right at her, and her eyes lock onto his, awaiting orders. Jesus gives orders and nature feels an irresistible pull to obey; even if she wanted to ignore his call she couldn't, and what's more, she doesn't want to. Her whole history, spanning back further than our minds can grasp is one long record of obedience, after obedience, after obedience, after submission, after yielding, after giving in, after letting him have his own way with her 10,000 times. How could she possibly ignore him now?

16. At this point, to refuse his command would be to undo herself; it would be to refuse her very design, the very reason for which he spoke her into being in the first place. If nature is to be nature, then she has no choice but to submit to His latest command, this time issued from a Galilean fishing boat. So she obeys, and the result, says Mark, is a Great Calm.

17. Now for me, v40 is the twist in the story. It's the last thing my upbringing prepared me to expect. I was taught, not with words, that my highest priority should be my own physical wellbeing and comfort, along with that of others; and I was taught, not always with words, that God's highest priority is just the same: My physical, temporal wellbeing and comfort. And I think many people I've known believe just this. So v40 is a splash of ice-water in the face.

18. If Jesus agreed with the doctrine of my American Dream upbringing his response would run as follows: "Guys, please forgive me for the intense mental stress you suffered as the result of my nap. Nothing is further from my desire than your discomfort, not to mention your danger. My wholehearted intention is for the next 3 years of discipleship to be a comfortable, enjoyable, stretching, enlightening, safe experience. I want you to be able to cultivate your Christian life within a

Gospel-centered context where your unique gifts and abilities can be fostered, and where you can learn to be grace-filled preachers of human flourishing. I fully expect you to be shaped and formed into dynamic change-agents who will help others think outside the box and work to liberate the oppressed of our world, being in the city for the city, and transforming the culture through incarnational engagement, all so that the world can finally see that we Christians can be just as cool as they are."

19. Compare that with what Jesus actually says: "Why are you guys such cowards?! Don't you have any faith?"

20. My prayer for this church, and every church, is that we would not only know the difference, but taste and smell the difference before we even form our thoughts. Taste the difference between modern, affluent, compromised evangelicalism, on the one hand, and the Sacred Writings, on the other.

21. So Jesus isn't pleased. Apparently he expects the 12 to come near to death but remain calm and trusting. The shock of this can be seen this way: If you saw me come close to death, and I was delivered at the last moment, but before being delivered my attitude was one of fear and distrust in God, how should you deal with me after? "Oh Dave! I'm so sorry for all the stress you just went through! I understand you were sinfully fearful and doubting God, but who can blame you?!"

22. Jesus can, that's Who. Jesus expects radical faith to the death. Calm, trusting, peaceful confidence in Father, Son and Spirit. And if you'll take some time to digest this, I think many of us, certainly me, have cause for repentance.

23. Well, comparing v40 with v41 yields an interesting idea. You see in v40 Jesus speaks of the disciples as "afraid." Then in v41 Mark says they were "very much afraid." These two statements come almost back to back and draw attention to themselves. So what are the objects of their fear? First, the sea storm. Second, Jesus. And you notice it is Jesus they end up most afraid of.

24. You might just look further down at chapter 5 v15. There Jesus has freed the demoniac from his legion of demons and the people come out to see the former demoniac, now clothed and in his right mind. What is their reaction? They are afraid. Afraid of what? No longer the demoniac, scary as he was. Like our present text, people are again afraid of Jesus.

25. Now our story of Jesus stilling the storm probably goes hand in hand with the story of the demoniac, but there isn't time to take them both. The point here is that Mark gives two stories back to back, partly in order to show us that there is something far scarier than the prospect of a sudden, violent death; and even far scarier than a man possessed by a whole army of demons. You know what that Scarier Thing is?

26. Why, it's Jesus, of course 😊 And this idea of Jesus being Scarier than Death and the Devil is very much to the point. I want you to consider that the reason the disciples failed by fearing the storm is because they first failed by not fearing Jesus. If they had entered that boat with the proper amount of fear and awe for Jesus, the storm would have affected them very little.

27. But they didn't enter the boat that way. They entered the boat having made the grave mistake of assuming they had Jesus figured out. They were sure they had him pinned by now; that they had already seen the height and depth of his power. But they hadn't.

28. And when Lake Galilee humbly bowed before her Master and resolved into a Great Calm, the disciples knew they had miscalculated Jesus. That's why they finish up the story with their famous question: "Who then is this?" They know now that they really don't get Jesus, not yet. Well, that's the text. Let's conclude by briefly focusing on the call for faith which we see in this text.

FAITH

1. There's not much time to mince words, and I don't like mincing anyway, so let's get right to it 😊 This text condemns our lack of faith. It's an explosion that blows to pieces any security we had that our present level of faith is sufficient. The level of faith that Christians often exhibit is far below the standard set in this text.

2. The disciples face imminent death and Jesus rebukes them for their fear. They shouldn't have been afraid. They should have called on Jesus for help with peaceful confidence; this confidence should have arisen from a spiritual insight into the Person of Jesus, that he is Son of God, maker of earth, water and sky. Or, if not that, they should have called on God and trusted him with whatever happened. Their fear and their rebuke of Jesus was nothing other than inexcusable unbelief. It is just this sort of sin that Jesus had to come to die for.

3. And I'm glad to say the cure for this unbelief is not a mystery. What did Jesus do to bring them from their low estimation of Jesus to a higher estimation? He revealed his glory in power by commanding the storm. This led to the question, "Who then is this?" And that is exactly the sort of thing we need. The reason we preachers always harp on prayer and bible study is not because we're broken records.

4. Nor is it even because we're particularly excited about prayer and bible study! It's because we know from experience that if the church is ever to reach a powerful, restful, effective faith in Jesus it will take beholding the revelation of his glory in power. And the ordinary realm in which this beholding occurs is believing, fervent prayer, and eager, hungry bible study.

5. People will sometimes come to me for counsel and support as they struggle with sins or hardships in life, and I'll try to exhort them and encourage them; sometimes I'll even threaten them if it comes to it. At the end of the day, I cannot do what they need done. That's because the reason they are failing in faith or holiness is a lack of

insight into the Person of God. What they need, I don't have. They need to see Jesus, and I can't conjure him from my back pocket. He doesn't follow my commands however hard I try; He's not at all a Tame Lion.

6. So I push them and urge them to seek him in Word and Prayer; I threaten them with hell if they won't do it! Because I know that what I can't accomplish in 300 years Jesus Christ can accomplish in a grand total of 3 seconds. And it isn't even hard. He doesn't actually do anything. He just pulls back our mortal veil and gives us one quick glance at himself, and the whole world is different.

7. I can't do what Christians need. I need Jesus to put them in the boat and bring them out on the Lake and whip up a frenzied sea storm and scare the hell out of them; bring them close to death so that finally they'll despair of themselves and call on him, and then they can watch as he subjects all things with a Word. And then they can see that their real problem, all along, wasn't the wind or the waves or how to enact their favorite political program or Satan or how to get their life to where they want it; Their real problem is that they simply haven't got a clue who Jesus is.

8. If that problem were solved, every other problem would take on a whole new character. When you finally eat the Bread of Life, it doesn't matter whether you get any other kind of bread.

9. Faith is to the soul what eating is to the body. And just as the body cannot eat without food, neither can the soul. The soul must feed on the vision of the glory of God in Jesus Christ. If it does, then and only then will we have the power to rest confidently while everything is burning down around us. And we saw in our text today that Jesus expects of us just that kind of rest.