

“Do you not care that we are perishing?” (Mark 4:35-41)

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Mark 4:35-41 ³⁵ *On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side."* ³⁶ *And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him.* ³⁷ *And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling.* ³⁸ *But he 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?"* ³⁹ *And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.* ⁴⁰ *He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?"* ⁴¹ *And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"*

There are three “greats” (μέγας Gr. *mega-*) in this story, which will provide an outline for this passage: a great storm (4:37), a great calm (4:39), and a great fear (4:41).

1. A great storm (4:37)

This was a real storm, and the disciples were in real danger. Sometimes we soften the picture due to stain glass images we've seen or Sunday school pictures we colored. Note: the “Galilee boat” discovered in 1986 on the north-west shore of the Sea of Galilee in Israel (27' long, 7.5' wide, only 4' deep, a shallow draft). It could hold 15 persons. Now restored and on display at Nof Ginosar. Storms could come up quickly and violently on the Sea of Galilee. Rembrandt's “Storm on the Sea of Galilee” captures a bit of the fury of the storm. The disciples' fear is not due to ignorance. Several of them were fishermen and knew sailing and the sea well. Their fears were well-founded, and their panic is evident.

What are you afraid of? Pain, illness, loss of loved ones, death, job loss, running out of money, health, fractured relationships...? For me it's those 4 am fears, when I wake up and just begin thinking about things, and then worrying. When you're younger you're worried about finding the right mate, finding a job, and making enough money. When you're older it's about losing the ones you love, or losing the ability to work, or how your children will turn out, will you have enough money to live on, how long will you have good health, and so on. For the Christian there is the added fears of: will I continue faithfully with the Lord, will I run my race well, am I fooling myself?

So in their panic here is what the disciples say to the Lord, “Teacher, *do you not care that we are perishing?*”

This is given as a question, but it is more of an indictment. It's like when you parents said, “what do you think you're doing?” That was less of a question, and more of an accusation! Perhaps the disciples thought that Jesus, being a rabbi, did not really know how desperate their situation was, or that he should be helping to bail water or at least give encouraging words!

We ask very similar questions...

- “God, why aren’t you doing something?”
- “Where are you when we really need you?”
- “Aren’t you concerned about what’s happening here?”
- “Is anyone up there? Don’t you care?”

2. A great calm (4:39)

Now Jesus is awake, and now he speaks to the wind and the waves like the weather were an unruly child. “Peace! Be still!” He does not pray, he just speaks with his own authority. He speaks like God, the Creator, at the beginning of time who says to inanimate creation, “let there be... and there was...” (NB. In the Bible only God can control the elements, the seas, the weather... and even today even though we can predict the weather with some accuracy we have no control over it whatsoever!

What happened next was no natural phenomenon - it was a miracle, a supernatural change. Wind can die pretty quickly, but waves of water stay agitated for quite some time, and yet now there a complete calm.

Sometimes God dramatically changes circumstances, and has done so in your life. An answer to prayer that changed things overnight. But often God calms his children rather than their circumstances. Some years ago when I was on a short-term mission trip to the Amazonas territory in southern Venezuela, we were being flown to some of the villages by missionary pilots in small Cessna aircraft. Our pilot said there was a storm we were needed to “skirt”. I think this is jungle pilot terminology for “go through.” (I think they have a twisted sense of humor, and want to see what these short-termers are made of...) Anyway, our little plane (I never felt so small in all my life!) was tossed about and I looked down at that trackless jungle and realized that it was possible that we could crash and die 2000 miles from home. But a sense of peace came over me as I realized that there is no place where Christ is not Lord, and also where I am Christ is, and where Christ is, is home and he’s my ultimate safety. We arrived at our destination fine, looking green, but fine.

Now Jesus turns to speak to his disciples. Sometimes the Lord addresses our fears directly. *“Peace to you, do not be afraid.”* Words to that effect are found over 100x in Scripture. But just like their question was an indictment, so is Jesus’. He asks two questions:

“Why are you cowardly / timid?” This is not the usual word for fear, but rather for the cowardice and timidity that comes from unbelief and panic. What was wrong here was not that they felt fear, but that they were acting on unfounded fears that made them act in a panicked and unreasonable way. I think it can be summed up in this short poem:

*When afraid,
When in doubt,
Run in circles,
Scream and shout.*

“Do you not yet have faith?” He identifies their problem: they have not thought through and believed what they have seen in and heard from Jesus. Martyn Lloyd-

Jones used to say often, “Christians sometime are praying when they should be thinking.”

Now I do not think all fears come from unbelief. There are some fears which are founded. A reverential fear of God is one. Also, if we are outside of Christ we should be afraid and seek haven in Jesus. Some fears may be the result of a medical condition or even temperament. But here, and probably in most cases for Christians, fear is a symptom of unbelief.

Psalm 56:3-4 When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?

Now, was he too hard on them? Was it too much to expect faith from them at this point? They had not in fact seen him do this kind of miracle before. But note:

a) They *had* seen his works of power, healing and casting out demons. Though they had not seen him still a storm before, they had seen how he stood up to the teachers and powerful people of his day. And they had never seen his word *not* come to pass. When he said, “let us go over to the other side...” they should have given him, and God, the benefit of the doubt, that Jesus (God’s Son) would not perish by drowning.

b) His current teaching had prepared them for this, if only they had meditated on it. “**On that day...**” (v. 35) is very important in this text. On the very same day that they got into the boat he had told them parables about hearing and nurturing the word proclaimed to them. And specifically they were told a parable about how the kingdom of God grows and advances just like a crop grows *even when the farmer sleeps* (4:27).

c) And finally, they have moved beyond a question or request for help. There would have been no problem if they had awakened Jesus and expressed their need to him. But their statement is edged with anger and accusation, coming from unbelief. They were accusing him, doubting his care and concern for them. They questioned his knowledge of the situation, his control of the circumstances, his judgment, his power, and his character. A strong word was needed at that moment.

We also need to remember that Jesus is speaking *not only to those disciples but to us* and to the ages: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” (Mark 13:31)

Jesus had commanded them to go to the other side. (Matthew 8:18 *Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders [commanded them] to go over to the other side.*) He said he was going to the other side, and to the other side he would go!

3. A great fear (4:41)

“**Who then is this...**” And now a new fear takes over. It’s different, not a craven fear of death or chaotic waters - all is calm now - but there’s now *this something* about *this Someone* they thought they had understood. Their panic and fear of the impersonal forces around them was replaced by a reverential fear of a Person. Perhaps it was like Jacob in Genesis 28, who had a vision of heaven’s stairway and

said, “God is in this place and I knew it not.” Or Isaiah when he saw the Lord (Isa. 6) and said, “I am undone... I have seen the Lord of Hosts.”

And this is the key to dealing with fear in our lives: an awareness, a realization of the greater power of Christ that causes our lesser fears to be driven out, replaced by a liberating reverence for Christ. You and I belong to a Savior that is greater than all we could fear. If we are gripped by lesser fears we will always be in bondage. Once we are awed by Jesus, there is actually a freedom that comes, a release from lesser fears! John Donne once said, “He that fears God fears nothing else.”

Even as believers our lives should be punctuated by times when we come to ever greater realization of Jesus and his nature. We need to have new, fresh discoveries of Christ, where we say again, “who IS this?” Have you ever felt undone, not by the world, but by Jesus himself? *Do you know him well enough to know that you don't really know him well enough?* We have only begun to scratch the surface of the knowledge of our Savior and God.

Do you also realize that you cannot be Jesus' handler? You cannot put him on a leash. You cannot manage him. *It is one thing to put your hand in his, it is another to think you have a handle on him.* The scribes and Pharisees learned that by experience, even his family learns that, and now the disciples are so shaken.

How this should affect us. Francis Schaeffer once said, “The spiritual battle, the loss of victory, is always in the thought-world.” As John Hannah taught us recently, the mind and heart, where we think right and true thoughts, is the key to our spiritual health and growth.

There are some things we are called upon to think about and believe and recall again and again: The immensity of his power, the goodness of his character, and the integrity of his Word. What Jesus says he can do, what he promises he will do, and everything he does is good.

This applies not just to us as individuals but also corporately, how God has dealt with his people over history. From the beginning both Israel and Christianity have been opposed by storms throughout their history. Many nations have sought to destroy the ancient nation of Israel, and yet they survive even today, even in their land. From the first century onward there were mighty powers that sought to destroy the followers of Jesus Christ. From the Roman emperors and the persecutions, to militant opposition of other religions, later to the skepticism of the Enlightenment and those who would exalt unbelief, then to Communist governments who sought to destroy belief in God, and the militant atheists today, many have said “this is their end, God is dead as a concept, the bible is outmoded, the modern world is post-Christian!” And yet the church has never been extinguished and has never been as healthy across the globe with nearly a billion adherents!

So, when Jesus said, “*Let's go to the other side*”...they were going, and they would get there and it didn't matter if storms or demons or evil men or illness or anything else in heaven and earth opposed them. They were going to the other side. And so it is with all of God's people. Even though the disciples saw the storm, the wind, the water, the sinking boat, thinking that they were perishing, they were unaware that

they actually were in the safest place in the world. Jesus would take them to his intended destination even if all the powers of weather, men, demons, hell and evil were aligned against him. We are safer with Jesus in a boat that appears to be sinking than any other place in the universe!

Consider this quote by the 17th century pastor, Jeremy Taylor:

“The unskilled, inexperienced Christian shrieks out whenever his vessel shakes, thinking it always in danger. Yet all his danger is in himself, none at all from without. For he is indeed moving upon the waters, but fastened to a rock. Faith is his foundation, hope is his anchor, death is his harbor, Christ is his pilot, and heaven is his country. All the evils of poverty, or affronts of tribunals and evil judges, of fears and sad apprehensions, are but like the loud wind blowing - they make a noise, and only drive us faster to our harbor. And if we do not leave the ship and leap into the sea; or quit the interests of Christ and run to the securities of the world, then we are as safe at sea, safer in the storm which God sends us, than in a calm when we are befriended by the world.” (Jeremy Taylor, 1613-1667, *Discourses, Vol. 2, Sermon 11*)

One last question: Why was Jesus asleep in the first place? (And he was asleep!) Why wasn't he helping bail water or at least giving them encouragement? The most obvious answer is that because he was fully human he was very tired and needed rest. He apparently had no doubt or concern about getting to the opposite shore. He was not agitated and he was resting.

But there may be a deeper reason why he slept. Had the disciples at this time been thinking about biblical history they would have remembered another prophet who fell asleep during a storm, and the storm stopped and the sailors were saved because that prophet (Jonah) was thrown overboard and disappeared under the waves. They never saw him again, he was as dead. But on the third day he was found alive on the shore. Jesus would say, (Matthew 12:40) *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 and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

Jesus could sleep, because *this* storm on the sea of Galilee would not be the real storm that Jesus would go through and be sorely tested in. There would be another time when a great storm would come against Jesus full force and then it would be the disciples who would be sleeping and he would be awake. And he would perish in that storm, which was not only the evil of man against him but also the judgment of God against the evil of man, all upon Christ. He would, as it were, disappear beneath the waves and perish. But on the third day, he is seen again, alive, and by his death the wrath of God against us has been stilled once and for all. He perished so that we would not perish. We can approach God now because justice has been satisfied and all is calm. After the Lord arose from the dead he spoke this same word that he spoke to the storm: “Peace!” [*Shalom*] This work of Christ is so great -- so great -- that we can never ever say, “Lord, do you not care that we are perishing?”

For discussion:

1. In what ways can you identify with the disciples in this story?

2. What do you think the disciples meant by their question, “Do you not care that we are perishing?” Have you said anything similar to God?
3. What are the three “great” things in this passage (4:35-41)?
4. Identify and share some of the things that you are tempted to fearful about.
5. When is fear a bad thing? A good thing? What’s the difference between feeling fear and acting in fear?
6. How would you describe the relationship between fear and faith? Does all fear come from unbelief?
7. When Jesus said, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” was he being too hard on them? Why or why not?
8. Francis Schaeffer wrote, “The spiritual battle, the loss of victory, is always in the thought-world.” Do you agree with that, or not?
9. What are some of the truths about the Lord that you need to think about often, as an antidote to fear? Share some Scripture passages that have been a help to you in dealing with fears.