

Jesus is in the Boat

Mark 4:35-41

Introduction

WWI was an intense and horrible conflict. It was fought between the years of 1914 and 1918. It was so horrible, that at the time it was even called the War to End All Wars.

Officially, WWI ended on November 11, 1918, but not before it had claimed 41 million casualties. Of that, there were over 18 million deaths and 23 million wounded, ranking it among the deadliest conflicts in human history. In fact, of those 18 million deaths, two-thirds were actually in battle, unlike the conflicts that took place in the 19th century when the majority of deaths were caused by disease.

During this horrific storm of our human history there was a man named Arthur Walkington Pink, an English Bible teacher who sparked a renewed interest in the exposition of Calvinism. Virtually unknown in his own lifetime, A.W. Pink became “one of the most influential evangelical authors in the second half of the twentieth century.”

The well-known Protestant minister, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, was a huge proponent of Pink’s writing ministry and encouraged people to read him. To one young minister, Lloyd-Jones said,

“Don’t waste your time reading Barth and Brunner. You will get nothing from them to aid you with preaching. Instead, read Pink.”

Now, as World War I ravaged on, Pink was writing what many consider his greatest work: *The Sovereignty of God*. During the devastation of the Great War, Pink is writing this:

“To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, thwart His purpose, or resist His will.”

In the introduction to the book, which was published shortly after the war ended, Pink wrote:

“A number of those who are regarded as leaders of Christian-thought told us that God could not help the coming of the late awful war, and the He was unable to bring about its termination.”

But Pink doesn’t believe this for a second, but writes:

“From every pulpit in the land it needs to be thundered forth that God still lives, that God still observes, that God still reigns.”

Even in the wake of one of the deadliest wars in human history, A.W. Pink wanted people to know that God is still on the throne. But many were conflicted about their belief in the ultimate sovereignty of God. Pink writes:

“Without a doubt a world-crisis is at hand, and everywhere men are alarmed. But God is not! He is never taken by surprise. It is no unexpected emergency which now confronts Him, for He is the one who ‘worketh all things after the counsel of his own will’ (Eph. 1:11). Hence, though the world is panic-stricken, the word to the believer is, ‘Fear not!’ ‘All things’ are subject to His immediate control: ‘all things’ are moving in accord with His eternal purpose, and therefore ‘all things’ are ‘working together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.’”

Even today, we can question and doubt the sovereignty of God. Is God *really* in control? We all deal with various trials and hardships that we certainly think can be a result of God not being in control. Our faith can waiver, and that can sink us into a deeper despair that the trial itself could have produced by itself. And so, enter our passage for today from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 4, when Jesus calms the storm.

So my plan for today is to retell the story that we find in the Gospel, providing some insights and applications along the way. But as I begin the retelling, I want us to focus in on what I believe is the main point...**Followers of Christ can always expect to encounter “storms” in this life, but fear not, the sovereign Jesus is in the boat!**

I wish I could tell you that when you become a follower of Jesus, that your problems and trials will drastically decrease. However, I can't do that. In fact, Jesus Himself says that many trials will come our way *because* of our alignment with Jesus. This passage in Mark chapter 4 tells us that “storms” will indeed come our way. But the good news: Jesus is in the boat.

And we're going to see through this story that Jesus isn't any ordinary man. No, He is the sovereign Lord of Creation. He is indeed the God of the universe who is completely in control at all times. When we go through the “storms” of life, fear not because Jesus is in the boat.

The Story

So...on the day we're looking at, Jesus had just been teaching a very large crowd about the kingdom of God using parables.

Verse 35

He had a busy day, so as evening came, Jesus tells his disciples, “Let us go across to the other side.” And what is on the other side of the Sea of Galilee? Gentile territory. Pastor Jeff is going to speak next week about what they encounter, but I want you to know that this the one time in Jesus ministry that we have Jesus and the disciples intentionally going to minister outside the land of Israel.

It's interesting that immediately after Jesus has been teaching about the kingdom reign of God, Jesus moves to Gentile territory. What is this significant? The Kingdom of God isn't just for Israel. The Kingdom of God isn't just for us. The Kingdom of God extends into the whole world. It may start small and secretly—as the parables taught us last week—but the Kingdom WILL expand to the ends of the earth.

And when Jesus says, “Let us go across to the other side,” this is not phrased as a request, but as a command to be obeyed. When Jesus speaks, we should listen and obey. No hesitation. No thinking about it. When *Jesus* commands, we obey. And so, verse 36 says...

Verse 36

“Leaving the crowd, they took [Jesus] with them in the boat, just as he was (he had already been in the boat teaching the crowds). And other boats were with him.”

The Gospel of Mark is characterized by quick-paced succinct writing, so I find this verse interesting. It seems irrelevant to the story. So why is it there? Well, this verse actually indicates historical recollection. This is an eyewitness account. The Gospel doesn't read like a myth—a

made-up story. Instead, it is written from the perspective of people who were actually there. That should excite us about the historicity and truthfulness of the gospel accounts.

So the disciples take Jesus in their fishing boat. In 1986, a well-preserved first-century boat was discovered in the Sea. Here's a photo of it. It measured 27 feet long, 7 ½ feet wide, was made of cedar planks and an oak frame, and could hold about 15 people. Here's another picture the recreates what a first century boat would have looked like.

So the disciples take Jesus on a leisurely ride across the lake and Jesus falls asleep as the boat gently rocks back and forth.

Verse 37

But this boat ride doesn't stay leisurely, does it? In verse 37 we read that a *great* storm arose. This is the first of three times that the word *great* is used. This was no gentle rainstorm. The wind and the waves really picked up. So much so that the water was coming into the boat.

Here's a photo of the Galilee region. As you can see, the sea had steep hills on all sides which made it susceptible to sudden storms. I had an opportunity in 1996 to actually sit with the bank of the Sea of Galilee in front of me, and the large hills to my back. I realized that there was no way you could see a storm approaching, especially at night which is the setting for this story.

Verse 38

And as this storm is threatening to swamp the boat, what is Jesus doing? He is in the stern—the back of the boat—sleeping. Now, of course, Jesus is exhausted from a long day of ministry. But Jesus being asleep during this great storm indicates his trust in God. Resting or sleeping in the Bible many times indicates trust in God's ultimate protection. Consider Psalm 3:5, when David was fleeing for his life from Absalom:

I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the Lord sustained me.

Or how about the very next psalm, Psalm 4:8:

In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

You see, Jesus commanded, "Let us go across to the other side." This is God's direction—God's leading. So Jesus knew they would arrive safely on the other side. Because of that trust, Jesus sleeps.

But as the storm rages on, the disciples interpret Jesus' sleep as not caring. So they wake Him up to accuse Him of indifference.

I think it's ironic that these same disciples who accuse Jesus of not caring *here*, are the same disciples who will fall asleep in the Garden of Gethsemene right before Jesus' betrayal, trial and crucifixion. When Jesus was praying the Garden, that truly *was* a time of great peril—a great storm for Jesus. He was about to die—but his disciples sleep. Do *they* care that *Jesus* is about to actually perish?

Now, the Gospel of Mark was written to the 1st Century church that was facing intense persecution. Certainly, the storm was intense for the early church, and was only going to get

worse. Those people might have had similar reactions as these disciples in the midst of persecution: “God, don’t you care? Are You indifferent to our suffering?”

And we say the same thing today, don’t we? When we go through difficult times—through “storms” of life—we find ourselves feeling like God is absent. He doesn’t care about us.

- Where is God when we are suffering with sickness?
- Where is God when we can’t seem to overcome the addictions in our lives?
- Where is God when our children aren’t turning out the way we’d hoped—when we feel like parental failures?
- Where is God when a man goes into a school with a gun and kills dozens of children?
- Where is God when we lose our job and can’t pay our bills?

But we are called to a greater understanding and awareness of WHO is in the boat with us during these life “storms.” Remember, the main point today...**we should always expect to encounter “storms” in our lives.** That’s a given. But let’s continue on to learn more about this Jesus who is in the boat with us.

Verse 39

So what does Jesus do after the disciples wake him? Verse 39 says he “*rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.*” Here is the second use of the word “great” in our story. I don’t see this as a gradual decrease of the storm. No! Jesus words produced in immediate response from nature which caused a great calm. A silence that is almost deafening! Jesus has authority over the wind and the waves.

As you read the Bible from the very beginning, you learn quickly that it is GOD who has authority over nature, because He’s the one who created everything. Consider Psalm 104:7:

At your rebuke [the waters] fled; at the sound of your thunder they took to flight.

God Himself is the one who can still the seas. Psalm 89:9 describes God by saying,

You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.

Psalm 107, which was our OT reading this morning sounds like a precursor to our story today:

Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters...they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end. 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.

We learn here in Mark chapter 4 that JESUS is the Lord of Creation. He is GOD. As he has been announcing and teaching about the Kingdom of God, we learn *here* that he has all authority to do so. Jesus has come to us to restore God’s reign over fallen creation.

Jesus is Lord of Creation. He is the King over the Kingdom. And during the storms of your life, this same Jesus is in the boat. Are you beginning to understand more about the importance of Jesus’ identity? The more you understand who Jesus is, the more you can rest assured that he is in control and will bring you through.

Verse 40

Well, after Jesus rebukes the wind and the waves, He then turns to rebuke the disciples. He does so with 2 questions—one about their fear, the other about their faith. He said, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?”

You see, Jesus expects his followers to be bold in the midst of the storms that they face, because they *should* have an unwavering faith and understanding about who is in the boat with them. They can face life’s challenges because they trust in God’s ability to bring them through. Do you have that type of faith? Do you truly know the Jesus who is in the boat?

The disciples themselves struggled with the identity of Jesus, as we see in the final verse...

Verse 41

This demonstration of power from Jesus filled them with *great* fear. This is the third use of the word “great” in the story. They experience a very healthy fear of the divine as they experienced the awesome power of God. And this experience is certainly what prompted their response of “*Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?*”

You see, the whole point of this episode is to strengthen the faith of the disciples as well as teach them about his full and true identity as the Son of God. One commentator wrote it this way:

The subduing of the sea and wind was not merely a demonstration of power; it was an epiphany, through which Jesus is unveiled to his disciples as Savior in the midst of intense peril!

Jesus indeed is the *sovereign Lord*, so we need not fear. Remember our main point: **Followers of Christ can always expect to encounter “storms” in this life, but fear not, the sovereign Jesus is in the boat!**

Conclusion

The most important thing we can learn from this passage is a greater understanding of the Jesus we follow. He is not a mere man, but the Sovereign Lord of Creation who is in complete control no matter what the situation may look like in our own eyes.

Going back to A.W. Pink and his *Sovereignty of God*, he wrote:

So long as we are occupied with any other object than God Himself there will be neither rest for the heart nor peace for the mind. But when we receive all that enters our lives as from *His* hand, then, no matter what may be our circumstances or surroundings—whether in a hovel, a prison, a dungeon, or a martyr’s stake—we shall be enabled to say, “The lines are fallen unto me in *pleasant* places.”

He continues:

The man of faith *brings in God*, looks at everything from *His* standpoint, estimates values by spiritual standards, and views life in the light of eternity. Doing this he receives whatever comes as from the hands of God. Doing this, his heart is calm in the midst of the storm.

You know, the beautiful thing about truly knowing the Jesus who is in the boat with us, is that although storms will still come, those storms can now become opportunities for God to transform us more into his likeness. That's why James wrote,

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

Additionally, I want you to understand that this story does NOT teach that Jesus will deliver us from the "storms" of life. No! We will continue to encounter storms.

Instead, this story *primarily* teaches us about *who* Jesus is! We should not expect *miraculous* intervention that will calm *all* the "storms" of our lives. We need to learn that Jesus does not deliver us from storms but through storms.

And when it comes right down to it, Jesus has already saved us, not from all the storms of this life, but ultimately from death and eternal destruction. Christ Jesus bore the penalty for our sin when he died on the cross. We, who were on boat leading straight into the eternal abyss, have been rescued by the Jesus who deals with our sin and death problem and rose again so that we too can live forever with Him.

So when we face storms in this life, if we have confidence in Christ's ultimate storm calming, that should help us face these temporary storms with courage and trust. Why? Because Jesus, the sovereign Lord, is in the boat with us. So...

- If you personally, or someone you know is struggling with sickness, fear not, Jesus is in the boat!
- If you are dealing with the death of a friend or relative, fear not, Jesus is in the boat!
- If you are struggling as a parent of your children for any reason, fear not, Jesus is in the boat!
- If you are struggling to pay all your bills, fear not, Jesus in is the boat!
- If you face dark days of depression, when it seems like no one cares, including God, fear not, Jesus is INDEED in the boat!

No matter what "storm" you are personally facing, you need to leave today remembering that Jesus—the sovereign God of the universe, the one who holds all things in His hands, the savior who died for you to save you from ultimate destruction—is in the boat with you! Amen!