

Facing the Storms of Life

Scripture: *Mark 4:1 & 35-41 & Jonah 1:1-17.*

Exegetical Big Idea: The *identity* of Jesus Christ as our Redeemer enables us to navigate our *inevitable* storms of life, no matter how *intense* they may be.

Introduction

Our topic of reflection this morning is: *Facing the Storms of Life*. Our main Bible texts for our reflections on this topic are: **Mark 4:1 & 35-41** and **Jonah 1:1-17**.

Throughout his Gospel Mark reveals that his primary aim for writing his Gospel was to convince his readers of the identity of Jesus Christ. This is why, right from the very first verse of his Gospel, in **Mark 1:1**, Mark refers to Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Mark wanted his readers to understand that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Messiah who had come to fulfill the OT prophecies of **Isaiah 40-55** that spoke of a Suffering Servant of God who would one day come into the world to lay down His life for God's people.

This is why in the first half of Mark's Gospel, from **chapters 1 to 8**, you will notice that most of the stories revolve around the identity of Jesus Christ. In these chapters we see the crowds, the disciples, and the Jewish leaders all constantly reacting to Jesus' miracles by asking: *Who is this man?* In other words: *What is His identity?*

This is exactly what we see in our **Mark** passage of reflection this morning. After He had calmed a storm on the Lake of Galilee that threatened the lives of His disciples we see them asking in awe: *Who is this?* This story of Jesus calming the storm in **Mark 4**, and our **Jonah** passage, helps us to gain a Gospel perspective of the *inevitability* of our storms of life, the *intensity* of these storms, and how the *identity* of Jesus Christ enables us to face our storms of life.

I. The Inevitability of our Storms (Verses 35-37)

- 1) **Verse 1** tells us that Jesus was teaching by the Lake of Galilee and that the crowd that had gathered around Him was so large that he got into a boat, He sat in it out on the Lake, with the crowd listening to Him from the shore at the water's edge. From **verse 2** to **verse 34** we read that, through a number of parables, Jesus taught the crowd about the Kingdom of God.
- 2) **Verses 35** and **36** tell us that, having taught the crowds the whole day, in the evening, Jesus said to His disciples, *Let us go over to the other side*, meaning the other side of the lake. Jesus was obviously exhausted and saw the need for Him and the disciples to get away for some rest. So, He and the disciples left the crowd behind, and they set off to the make the journey to the other side of the Lake. **Verse 37** tells us that as they made their way across the Lake, a furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.

- 3) A squall is a sudden violent localized storm. Such localized storms were fairly common on the Lake of Galilee because of the surrounding topography. The Lake is almost 700 feet below sea level and it is surrounded by hills. So, sometimes when strong winds blew cool air through the hills this cool air would collide with the trapped warm air over the water, and this would create the volatile conditions that produced the squalls, or storms, over the Lake.
- 4) So, here they were, the disciples, all of them seasoned fishermen, who were very familiar with the Lake of Galilee because they frequently fished and travelled on this Lake, now caught in the middle of the Lake in this life-threatening storm. They knew that these storms were a possibility on this Lake but they hadn't expected this one. They thought this was going to be just another routine trip across the Lake. In fact, **verse 36** says: *Leaving the crowd behind, they took him (Jesus) along, just as he was, in the boat.* In other words, they had not seen the need to make any special preparations for this trip. They had embarked on the journey in their boat across the Lake, just as they were, not expecting any unusual occurrence on the trip. The Lord had said to them, *Let us go over to the other side,* and they had obeyed without a thought. They had expected only the usual routine navigation of the boat that would be required to get it across, but here they were, in this squall, in this storm, fighting for their lives.
- 5) This is just like you and I living our everyday lives, obediently doing whatever the Lord has shown us to be His will for us. Like the disciples in their boat, we expect to navigate our way through life facing the usual daily frustrations of living in this broken world such as managing our aging mortal bodies, managing the usual difficulties in our work, being misunderstood by colleagues, navigating our way and our emotions through Nairobi traffic, etc.
- 6) Sometimes, however, like the disciples in this boat, we find ourselves unexpectedly facing the kind of storm the disciples were now facing in their boat on Lake Galilee. For you and I this may involve a frightening situation concerning our health or the health of a loved one. Or it could be an unexpected depressing financial challenge. Or it could be an extreme situation where we are even faced with physical danger such as the people who worked in the Dusit2 compound suddenly found themselves facing in the terrorist attack earlier this year. Let me give you an example of this. (*Narrate James & Duncan Westgate story*).
- 7) The storm that the disciples faced on the Lake of Galilee, given the surrounding topography and the weather conditions of that region, sooner or later, was inevitable. Same with us; living in this broken world, sooner or later it is inevitable that these storms will come to us. We don't look for them, but they can come to us. And the thing is, no matter how many storms you have faced in the past, every new storm carries its own life-threatening danger and it always seems as though this is the one that will finally undo you. This *inevitability* of the storms of life that come to us, even when we walk in obedience to the Lord, is the first truth that we see in this passage.

II. The Intensity of our Storms (Verses 39-40)

- 1) **Verse 37** tells us that the furious storm whipped up the waters of the Lake into such a violent intensity that the waves broke over the boat, so that the boat was nearly swamped. The disciples were seasoned fishermen who spent their lives fishing on this lake. They knew how to navigate their way across the waters of this Lake. Now, however, in the intensity of this storm, they realized that all their lake navigation skills and experience would not help them. They realized that they needed help beyond their natural human skills and experience.
- 2) This is like you and I. When we face the regular old challenges of our everyday lives we try as best as we can to resolve them and get on with it. We share the difficulties that come to us with our family and our friends, and we ask them to stand with us in prayer, as we rightly should, of course. If our problems require professional assistance we go and see a doctor, or a lawyer, or a financial expert, or whoever. But there are storms that come to us that are so intense that we realize that real help can only come supernaturally from the Lord Himself.
- 3) In the case of the disciples in this storm we read in **verse 38** that Jesus was in the stern of the boat, fast asleep on a cushion. He was evidently exhausted from preaching and teaching the crowds all day. The disciples woke him up in their panic and said to Him: *Teacher, don't you care if we drown?* Again, this is like us. Facing the intensity of some of the storms that come to us we pray and we pray some more, and yet sometimes, like the disciples, it seems the Lord has gone to sleep on us because we see no change. In fact, sometimes, things seem to go from bad to worse, and we feel like screaming in panic to the Lord, like the disciples in this boat: *Heavenly Father, don't you care if we drown? Don't you care if my loved one dies of cancer? Don't you care if the bank forecloses on my property? Don't you care if my child just goes astray like this? Don't you care if I lose this job? Don't you care if this marriage falls apart?*
- 4) The disciples were seeing in the intensity of this storm, a real existential threat to their lives from the angry, chaotic waters of the Lake of Galilee. In **verse 39** we read that Jesus finally got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves: *Quiet! Be still!* The wind died down immediately and it was completely calm. In **verse 40**, after rebuking the storm, Jesus then turned to the disciples and rebuked them with these words: *Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?*
- 5) But, really, can we blame the poor disciples? They looked at the intensity of the storm, they looked at the record of how many boats and how many seasoned fishermen like themselves had drowned on this Lake in such storms, they looked at the waves breaking over their hapless boat, drenching them wet, and they panicked! Their faith in God had been blown away by the violent winds of the storm! I don't know about you, but I go through this all the time. In the intensity of some of the storms I face, especially when I think that God has gone to sleep on me, my faith in God is blown away.

- 6) The intensity of our storms can overtake our faith even though we know God is with us. This can happen to the best of us. In **2 Cor. 1:8**, as the Apostle Paul evidently faced the intensity of a life storm of his own, he wrote this: *We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself.*
- 7) Paul knew that God was with him but, in the intensity of the storm he writes about here, he despaired of life itself. He was like the disciples in this boat on Lake Galilee. He was like you and I, facing the *intensity* of our own storms of life.

III. The Identity of Christ in our Storms (verses 34-38)

- 1) So, what does this passage teach us about how we should face our storms of life so that our Christian lives are not just a long miserable, unpredictable experience of facing one storm or the other?
- 2) I don't know if you noticed it, but Mark's account of this storm uses identical words and phrases as the story of Jonah we read in **Jonah 1**. In both stories, Jesus and Jonah are in a boat in a storm. Both boats have other people in them who are terrified to death. Both groups of terrified people wake up the sleeping prophets angrily, rebuking them. Both storms are miraculously calmed and the people in the boat are saved. And in both stories the men in the boats are *more* terrified after the storm is stilled than they were before. Every feature in the two stories is the same, with one notable exception; in Jonah's story, Jonah is sacrificed into the storm, thrown into the deep, to satisfy the wrath of God so that the other men in the boat will be saved from the storm. In Mark's account, however, Jesus is not thrown overboard.
- 3) It is easy to miss the fact that the accounts are not really that different in how they end. I say this because, in **Matt. 12:40-41**, Jesus described Himself by saying: *A greater than Jonah is here.* He then went on to say this: *As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.* By saying this, Jesus was pointing to the fact that He is the ultimate Jonah, who, on the cross, would be thrown into the waters of God's wrath for us. In **Jonah 2:4**, in the belly of the fish that had swallowed him, Jonah prayed to God by saying: *I have been banished from your sight.* Jonah meant that he felt forsaken by God. When in **Matt. 27:46**, on the cross, Jesus said: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* He was saying that for your sin and my sin, He had been put under the waters of God's wrath.
- 4) This shows us how ironic it is that in **verse 38** of our Mark passage the disciples rebuked the Lord by saying: *Teacher, don't you care if we drown?* They believed He had gone to sleep on them in their hour of desperation and need. Actually, it's the other way around because in the Garden of Gethsemane, we read in **Matt. 26:36-44**, that it is they, the disciples, who will go to sleep on Him. It is they who would abandon Him in his great hour of need and flee from Him.

- 5) And yet, even after they had abandoned Him like that, Jesus still loved them enough to go to the cross for them, and for us. Jonah was thrown into the storm for *his* sin. Jesus was thrown into the storm for *our* sin.

- 6) In **verse 41**, we read that the terrified disciples, after Jesus had calmed the storm, asked each other: *Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!* This shows us that they had not yet come to understand the real identity of Jesus Christ as God the Son, who has complete control of nature. It was only after His death and resurrection that they came to understand Christ's true identity as God the Son, who had complete control over nature, and over all events and circumstances at all times. It was then that they understood that although Christ could easily have chosen to avoid being arrested and crucified it was out of His great love for them that made Him still willingly choose to go to the cross for them. For example, in **John 10:17-18**, Jesus said this: *I lay down my life, only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.*

- 7) For you and I, then, it is our deliberate reminder to ourselves of the true *identity* of Jesus Christ as our Messiah who, on the cross, willingly faced the ultimate storm of God's wrath over our sin, and endured it for us, that enables us to recover our faith in Him, that enables us to lose our fear, and that enables to carry on with our journey across the turbulent waters of life in this broken and fallen world.

Conclusion

This is how these **3I's** from this Mark passage help us to gain a Gospel perspective of the *inevitability* of our storms of life, the *intensity* of these storms, and how the *identity* of Jesus Christ enables us to navigate our way through our storms of life.

These **3I's** mean that when a Christian goes through the storm of cancer or some other serious ailment and does not recover, or when the bank forecloses of the home of a Christian, or a when Christian marriage ends in a painful divorce, it is not because the Lord slept through those storms. Instead, it simply means that, for the Christian who passes away, the Lord has allowed them to cross over from physical death into eternal spiritual life. It means that the Lord has other journeys ahead for the divorced Christian, and for the Christian family who has lost their home or business to the bank foreclosure.

In **Psalm 121:4** the Psalmist reminds us that the Lord who watches over us *neither slumbers nor sleeps*. This is why Christ Jesus, in this passage, in addition to His fatigue, could sleep through the storm. He knew that the Father had *neither slumbered nor slept* on Him so that He would perish in a storm on Lake Galilee and thereby abort His mission to go to the cross to become our Savior. He had no fear of the storm because He had faith in the Father and the Father's plan for His earthly life. This is why, in **verse 40**, He asked the frightened disciples: *Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?*

So, whatever storm you are facing this morning, I am here to remind you that the identity of Jesus Christ as your Messiah who, on the cross, faced the ultimate storm of God's wrath over your sin, means that the Lord will certainly not abandon you in this storm. Even if you have prayed, and prayed, and it looks like God has gone to sleep on you, He really is not asleep. This is how Paul put it in **Rom. 8:31-32** - *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?* Indeed, how then, shall He not rescue us from our storms of life?

As I end, it seems to me that the real question that each one of us needs to face this morning is this: Have you, like the disciples, come to understand the real identity of Jesus Christ as your Messiah, and therefore repented of your sin, placed your faith in Christ in gratitude for Him taking the place of punishment for your sin on the cross, so that you have received God's forgiveness and become His child?

It is only when and if we have done this that we can have the firm assurance that, in the *intensity* of the *inevitable* storms of life that we still have to face in this life, Christ Jesus, in His *identity* as our Messiah, will exercise His complete control over our storms and rescue us, as He does for the disciples in this passage.

Let us pray!

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18th July 2019.