

**Who Then Is This?**  
**Mark 4:35-41**  
**ABC 11/20/22**

Today will be our last time in our study of Mark for a bit but it's not our last time looking at Jesus. Advent starts next week & we'll spend all of Advent looking at Him. Today's text is one of the best known & loved events of Jesus life. **Mk 4:35-41**

By calming the storm Jesus demonstrates His divine authority over the forces of nature, calls the disciples to greater faith in Him, & provokes their awe as they wonder in amazement, **Who then is this, that even the wind & the sea obey Him?** (41). Before we get into it, note that this event has some interesting parallels with the story of Jonah. Like Jesus, Jonah is sleeping through a storm at sea (Jonah 1:5). Jonah is awakened by sailors in fear for their lives (1:6), & after he's thrown into the sea, it immediately grows calm (1:15); this provokes fear & awe among the observers (1:16). There are also many differences, since it's Jonah's disobedience that causes his storm & it's God's discipline against Jonah that stills it. While the captain tells Jonah to pray to his God, Jesus Himself commands the wind & the waves & the sailors' fear & awe are directed toward Jonah's God, not toward Jonah himself. If the parallels are intentional on Mark's part, they serve to confirm that **something greater than Jonah is here** (Mt 12:41; Lk 11:32),<sup>1</sup> which is certainly true.

**1. The Setting** is found in vss 35-36. Mark's reference to evening **on that day** reminds us that a lot has happened on this day. It began with blasphemous accusations by the Pharisees that He was controlled by Satan. Then His family wanted to take him back to Nazareth because they thought He was out of His mind. Next, leaving the crowded house he went down by the sea, where before a great crowd He began teaching in parables. So vast was the throng that He got into a boat & taught the rest of the day from it in the hot sun.<sup>2</sup> Now He says to His disciples, **Let us go**, which is a command, to **the other side**, which refers to the southeastern shore (5:1). No reason is given for the journey, although in light of Mark's comments about Jesus' popularity & the large crowds around Him, Jesus may have been seeking a time of rest or it could be in keeping with the principle

<sup>1</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT, pp 205–206

<sup>2</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant & Savior*, vol. 1, Preaching the Word, p 112

expressed in Mk 1:38, **Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for.** Notice it's Jesus who directs His disciples into trouble. This storm isn't a case of disobeying God & His judgment comes upon them. No, the disciples are doing what Jesus told them to do. They're obeying Him & they'll find themselves in trouble. **The boat** is likely the same boat that Jesus asked to have ready in 3:9 & from which He taught in 4:1. No indication is given of the size of the boat, but the discovery in 1986 of a remarkably well-preserved 1<sup>st</sup>-century fishing boat gives an idea. The boat measured 27 ft long, 7.5 ft wide, & 4.5 ft high & was made of cedar planks & an oak frame.<sup>3</sup> The boat was propelled by 4 rowers (2 per side) & could carry up to 15 people.<sup>4</sup> Jesus & the 12 could have easily fit in such a boat. When it says, **just as He was,** it probably means they left without Jesus going back to shore. The disciples get in the boat with Him & shove off for the other side. The **other boats** that accompanied them seems to be a pointless detail & suggests an eyewitness account. These other boats probably contained other followers of Jesus, part of the larger group mentioned in 4:10. These boats aren't mentioned again & play no role in the story & we don't know what they experienced or saw. This & other incidental details, like **the cushion** on which Jesus is sleeping probably indicates Peter's eyewitness testimony. In this passage, Mark uses the term *great or enormous* 3x, the Greek term, *mega*, & we'll use that as our outlines. Mark 1<sup>st</sup> uses this term to describe the tempest that struck (37). It wasn't just a gale, it was a mega-storm that surpassed the usual squalls that occurred on the Sea of Galilee. The 2<sup>nd</sup> usage of *mega* is when Jesus rebuked the wind & the sea & the mega-storm turned into a mega-calm (39). Mark's 3<sup>rd</sup> use of the term *mega* is fascinating. He uses it to describe the fear of the disciples after Jesus calms the storm (41). He says they *mega*-feared, they were **very much afraid** or **feared exceedingly** (KJV).<sup>5</sup>

## **2. The Mega-Storm 37-38**

The geography of the Sea of Galilee, located in the Jordan Rift Valley, makes it susceptible to sudden storms. It's nearly 700 feet below sea level in a basin surrounded by hills & mountains that

<sup>3</sup> Shelley Wachsmann, *The Galilee Boat: 2,000-Year-Old Hull Recovered Intact*, BAR 14/5 (1988), pp 18–33

<sup>4</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar NT Commentary, p 148

<sup>5</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Mark*, First Edition, St. Andrew's Expository Commentary, p 92

are especially steep on the east side. 30 miles to the northeast Mt Hermon rises to 9,200 ft above sea level. The interchange between cold upper air from Mt Hermon & warm air rising from the Sea of Galilee can produce unpredictable weather conditions for which the lake is famed.<sup>6</sup> The tranquility of their journey across the lake ended when, suddenly, **there arose a fierce gale of wind**. Mark added *megas* to intensify His description of the hurricane-like tempest. Luke, in his account, reports that the winds **descended** on the lake (8:23), to convey they were racing down the slopes & whipping across the surface of the water. Matthew describes the violent shaking of the storm by using the word *seismos*, from which we get *seismic* (8:24). The ferocious winds quickly turned the surface of the lake into a raging, convulsive sea. Though the disciples undoubtedly bailed as fast as they could, **the boat was being covered with the waves** (Mt 8:24) so that **they began to be swamped & to be in danger** (Lk 8:23). In a culture where swimming wasn't a recreational activity, sinking in rough seas in the middle of the lake would result in loss of life (Mt 14:30). Jesus sleeping during the storm recalls Jonah, but for Jonah the implication is he's oblivious to the needs of those around him. Not so with Jesus. Why was Jesus asleep? Restful sleep despite danger can indicate trust in God (Ps 3:5; 4:8; Prov 3:24), & this idea is probably present here. But equally significant is that Jesus is exhausted after a long day of ministry. Although, for Mark, Jesus is the mighty & authoritative Son of God, He's also fully human, with the limitations & weaknesses of all mankind. Ironically, the only place in the gospels we read of Jesus sleeping is during this storm. Jesus was 100% man. He was human like we are. He was fully man. He was also fully God as we'll see when He stills the storm. In this one event we have Jesus being 100% man needing sleep, but also 100% God, the only One that can command nature to do His will.

Needless to say, the disciples were terrified by the storm. It must have been bad since many of the disciples were professional fishermen on this very lake. To their credit, they turned to Jesus in their fear. They found Him in the back of the boat, sleeping. The disciples address Jesus as **Teacher** here. Matthew's parallel has **Lord**, & Luke has **Master**. Why so different if they're all the same event? Put yourself there with 11 other friends. You'd all be yelling out to Jesus & you'd all use

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<sup>6</sup> G. A. Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, pp 441–442

different words. The rhetorical question of the disciples, **do You not care that we are perishing?** is certainly a cry for help but also carries an accusation. To them it looks as though Jesus is indifferent to their danger & doesn't care they're about to die. To their discredit, they took His ability to sleep through such a turmoil as a lack of concern, not just for His own safety, but for theirs as well. We see from Mark's description the disciples were both afraid & angry. They not only woke Jesus, they rebuked Him. The question had to have occurred to the disciples, *Can't the One who heals the sick & casts out demons save His own disciples?* The disciples are here revealing a lack of faith (40) & their inability to fully understand who Jesus is (41).

**3. The Mega-Miracle** Jesus displayed His humanity in His sleeping because of how tired & exhausted He was. Here He displays His deity with this undeniable act of calming the storm. **39**

Perhaps nowhere else in Scripture is the humanity of Christ more dramatically juxtaposed with His deity. The One sleeping in the stern of the boat, exhausted after a long day, is the One who'd stop the storm with a word. Demonstrating His divine authority over nature, Jesus 1<sup>st</sup> rebukes the wind & silences the sea. The Living Word says, **Hush, be still**. The Greek for **be still** carries the sense of being muzzled & is the same term Jesus used to silence the demon (3:12). The grammar indicates the condition should continue, that is, *be still & stay still*. It's often said, *everyone talks about the weather but no one does anything about it*. That's not true about Jesus. Who is the only One with the power to control creation? The Creator. The OT describes God as the Lord of creation, who speaks & the seas obey. We read in the OT, **You, God, rule the swelling of the sea; When its waves rise, You still them** (Ps 89:9). Ps 104:6-7 reads, again speaking of God, **You covered it with the deep as with a garment; The waters were standing above the mountains. At Your rebuke they fled, At the sound of Your thunder they hurried away**. Ps 107:23-29 sounds almost like a poetic paraphrase of the present event:

**Those who go down to the sea in ships, Who do business on great waters; They have seen the works of the LORD, & His wonders in the deep. For He spoke & raised up a stormy wind, Which lifted up the waves of the sea. They rose up to the heavens, they went down to the depths; Their soul melted away in their misery. They reeled & staggered like a drunken man, & were at their wits' end. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, & He brought them out of their distresses. He caused the storm to be still, So that the waves of the sea were hushed.**

Only God commands the wind & the waves. Yet Jesus speaks & nature obeys. He does this to show that He does what only God can do. Therefore, Jesus is God. Just as God commanded light to appear at creation, Jesus said to the wind & sea, **Peace, be still!** (KJV) & as soon as He commanded it, the sea was like glass. There wasn't the slightest zephyr left. Everything was calm.<sup>7</sup> Jesus does what only God can do. Who is Jesus? The One sleeping in the back of the boat from exhaustion & God incarnate, the King of God's kingdom He came to establish.

It's interesting how people try to discount Jesus deity in this event. One explained away the miracle by claiming that Jesus didn't speak to the sea but only cried out, *What a dreadful storm! It must be over soon.* The disciples misunderstood His words as the cause of the sudden calm.<sup>8</sup> That's not what happened. At His command the *mega-storm* (37) is replaced by a *mega-calm* (39).

#### **4. The Mega-Fear** Having rebuked the sea, Jesus now rebukes the disciples. **40-41**

Whereas the seas were calm, the disciples were anything but calm. They remained agitated, not by the wind & waves outside the boat, but by the Man inside the boat. They had accused Him of indifference, of not being concerned about them (38). Isn't it marvelous & comforting that Jesus didn't rebuke them for their words?<sup>9</sup> Instead He asks 2 rhetorical questions, one about their fear, **why are you afraid?** & one about their lack of faith, **do you still have no faith?** The 2 go hand in hand. There's a clear tension here. The disciples have just been presented as the *insiders*, the recipients of the secrets of the kingdom of God (4:11). Yet they'll repeatedly waiver & fail. They've demonstrated some faith. They've left their jobs to follow & listen to Him. They've demonstrated faith, but their faith had a breaking point. It was still immature, in process, & needing to grow. That's what we see here. They're not asking Him to solve the situation. They're waking Him up to say there's no hope. They've seen Him do amazing miracles & teach with authority only to tell Him now, *we're going to die & You don't care.* Their faith still needed to grow. We know God can do all things, right? We're aware of the truths of Scripture, but we too fail to make the application. If the trial's small enough, if it's not that big of a deal, or if we have enough time, then we can make the

<sup>7</sup> Sproul, pp 91–92

<sup>8</sup> David E. Garland, *Mark*, The NIV Application Commentary, p 194

<sup>9</sup> William Hendriksen & Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, vol. 10, NT Commentary, p 179

application, & say, *I need to trust God*. But if it's big enough, all a sudden, we forget everything we know about Jesus. We forget everything we've read in Scripture. We forget everything we know to be true about who God is & His power & sovereignty. Instead, we complain, *Woe is me! I'm going to perish*. We lack faith. The disciples lack faith & God uses this event not just to display who Jesus is but also to show the disciples lack of faith. They still had room to grow, as do we all. Despite all they'd seen, they weren't completely mature & firm in their faith. They needed to grow & that's what Jesus addresses here. Jesus calming the storm doesn't calm them. Instead, **they became very much afraid**. The verb **to fear** literally says, *They feared a great fear*, or in real English, *They were terrified*. Their fear of the storm, calmed by Jesus, becomes a fear of the Divine as they experience the awesome power of God. We dare not miss the significance of this in the lives of the disciples. The intensification of their fear is their response to a new depth of understanding about who Jesus is.<sup>10</sup> They're now aware that standing in the boat with them is more than just a man. They wouldn't doubt for one minute that He was a man. They'd just seen Him sleeping. But He's more than a man. No man commands the winds & waves. They're suddenly conscious of One who is greater than all of them, greater than anyone they've ever met. This is the Son of God. This is the Lord of glory. This is the Christ, the Creator of the universe. Stunned, they ask, **Who then is this...?** They thought they knew Jesus. They thought they understood Him. But now they've seen Him command nature & they can't wrap their minds around it. The answer to their question, **Who then is this?** is known to us (1:1, 11), but it will only gradually unfold throughout the gospel until it climaxes with the centurion's cry at the foot of the cross, **Truly this man was the Son of God** (15:37).

2 important theological themes are present in this episode, the 1<sup>st</sup> related to the identity of Jesus & the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the faith of the disciples. The 1<sup>st</sup> is the more important. Mark's purpose is primarily Christological, demonstrating Jesus' extraordinary authority over the forces of nature. The central theme of Mark's gospel up to this point has been Jesus' authority as Messiah & Son of God. This episode takes this to a new level as Jesus commands nature. The climactic question of the disciples, **Who then is this?** will be repeated in various forms in the chapters to follow. The people wonder

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<sup>10</sup> RC Sproul, *Mark*, First Edition, St. Andrew's Expository Commentary, p 92

about Jesus' identity, whether He's John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets (6:14–15). Herod too wonders whether Jesus might be John back from the dead (6:16). Jesus raises the question of His identity with His own disciples: **Who do people say that I am?** (8:27–30). They respond with the answers previously given, to which He responds, **But who do you say that I am?** Peter answers by affirming that **You are the Christ, the Messiah.** Jesus is God incarnate. What is true of the God of Israel is true of Him. At all times & in every sphere He exercises sovereign control over the situation. The subduing of the sea & the wind wasn't merely a demonstration of power, it was an unveiling of Jesus to His disciples as the Savior in the midst of intense danger.<sup>11</sup>

Beside this Christological theme is a secondary one concerning the response of the disciples & their failure to trust in Jesus through the storm. As early as Tertullian (160–220 AD), the boat in this story has been seen to symbolize the church facing the storms of persecution.<sup>12</sup> While it's unlikely Mark understood the episode in this way, throughout his gospel the disciples are models (usually negative ones) for discipleship. When Jesus says, **Do you still have no faith?** He's referring back to the healings & exorcisms they've already seen. If they've already witnessed the inbreaking of the kingdom of God, shouldn't they have trusted Him in the midst of the present storm? This is the beginning of a pattern of failure that will run throughout the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of Mark's gospel, where Jesus alone functions as the faithful model of discipleship. The disciples fail repeatedly through a combination of pride (8:32; 9:33–34; 10:13, 35–45), lack of faith (9:19), & an inability to understand the work of God (6:52; 7:18; 8:17–18, 32; 9:5–6). These 3 go hand in hand. Success in the Christian life comes from a humble heart of service, faith in God's power to sustain us through trials, & sensitivity to God's purpose in the world. Instead of pursuing our own ambitions, we're called to **seek first the kingdom of God** (Mt 6:33), & as we do so we will receive all we need to prosper spiritually.

In the midst of the storm the disciples panic & accuse Jesus of forsaking them (38). In their response Mark may intend a parallel between the situation of the disciples in the boat & those of his church

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<sup>11</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the NT, p 178

<sup>12</sup> Tertullian, *Bapt* 12

in Rome who lived under the dominion of pagan powers & gods, & who suffered persecution under Nero. Like the disciples, Mark's 1<sup>st</sup> readers may have thought God indifferent to their hardship & suffering. This story assured them, as it assures us, that even the worst storms of life can't swamp the boat in which Jesus is gathered with His disciples.

Face it: We can claim to be courageous when everything is calm. We can have faith in God's deliverance when we don't sense any urgent need to be delivered. When we come under extreme pressure, however, the courage & assurance that Jesus cares for His own, let alone preserves them from ultimate danger, can fade fast. Mark wrote his gospel for communities facing intense stress & a raging storm of persecution. This event should cause Christians' eyes to lift from the storms that engulf them & to fix them instead on Jesus who has the power over every storm.

The disciples may be *insiders* (4:10–11), but they don't yet fully understand Jesus, nor can they until the cross & resurrection. Jesus doesn't reproach the disciples for their lack of knowledge but for their fear, the Greek word for which means *losing heart* or *cowardice* (6:50–51). The real threat to faith comes not from lack of knowledge but from doubt & fear. The NT epistles teach these same fundamental truths. Paul says he can delight in weaknesses, insults, hardships, & persecution, because when he is weak, & fully dependent on God, that's when he is strong (2 Cor 12:10). He learned how to be content in any & every circumstance, because he can do all things through the One who strengthens him (Phil 4:12–14). Trials are opportunities for growth because suffering produces perseverance, which produces character, which produces hope, & hope in Christ never fails (Rom 5:3–5). James encourages believers to be joyful in various trials because the testing of our faith produces perseverance, & perseverance produces Christian maturity (Js 1:2–4). Peter says that such trials come so that **so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise & glory & honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ** (1 Pt 1:7). We need to look at life's storms not as disasters, but as opportunities to see God's transforming power at work in our lives.

We meet all kinds of people, & as we meet them, we unconsciously sort them. We do this every time we walk down the street, instantly pigeonholing every person we see. Is that person smiling?



He seems safe. Is there a crazy look in that person's eyes? We give him a little extra room. We sort everyone into categories: safe, dangerous, nice, cantankerous, grumpy, whatever. But we don't have a category for Someone who can speak to the waves & cause them to obey Him. Such a One is in a class by Himself. This One is so alien, so other, that there's no compartment for Him. What the disciples experienced on the Sea of Galilee was the deity of Christ. They liked His power when they were in trouble. But when He showed them His power, they said: *This Man is different from everyone else on earth.* Finding themselves in the presence of the Holy One of Israel, they were consumed by fear. That's why people run from God. As soon as God manifests His majesty, men are reduced to terror. If Christ in His majesty were to knock on your door, you wouldn't say, *Hi, buddy, come on in.* No, you'd fall on your face in fear. When the resurrected Christ in His glory & the manifestation of His holiness appears, all creatures will fall at His feet because He is other. He is holy. He is God. That means that not only do people tremble at His voice, but seas that have no ears listen to His command, & winds that have no knowledge know enough to stop blowing when He says, **Be still.** That's our Lord. Jesus intended to teach the disciples that they could trust Him even in the most dangerous & helpless situations. Even after Jesus' ascension, they would need to be reminded of that truth. As the author of Hebrews reminded his readers, **He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,' so that we confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?'** (Heb 13:5–6). Peter encouraged believers to cast **all their anxiety on Him, because He cares for them** (1 Pt 5:7). Writing to the Romans, Paul expressed that same kind of confident trust in the permanence of God's love:

**For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord** (Rom 8:38–39).

Mark concludes the stilling of the storm with a question that's a doorway to faith. The disciples were terrified. The presence of the supernatural is more frightening to humanity than the most destructive of natural disasters. Jesus is still a stranger to His own followers. Here God's nearness in Jesus isn't something reassuring but something profoundly unsettling, even terrifying. Yet such alarm produces the question that makes faith possible. It's a question that was 1<sup>st</sup> asked by the

crowd in 1:27 when they said, **What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, & they obey Him.** Now it is present on the lips of the disciples, **Who then is this...?** The question before the disciples & before us is this: Will our fear lead us to put our trust in Him? **Who then is this?** is a question everyone must answer. Who is Jesus? Is He your Savior? If so, then you should no longer be trying to save yourself or justify yourself or make yourself good enough. Is He your Lord & Master? If so, you should no longer be trying to call the shots in your life. Instead, surrender everything you are to Him. He's the sovereign Ruler of all things. Go to Him as such. Come before Him with any & every trial. Bow down & say, *You are the sovereign Ruler & You know exactly what I'm going through right now because You are with me.* In the storms you're passing through right now, do you think He's taking a nap & doesn't care for you? This Jesus who laid down His life for you, this Jesus who was scourged, beaten, nailed to a Roman cross, this Jesus who cried, **My God, why have You forsaken Me?** (Mk 15:34) cares for you more than you can ever know. Don't think for even a moment that He doesn't care about you & what you're going through. He's in the boat with you, right there in the middle of the storm. We must learn to trust in a Savior who doesn't deliver us *from* storms but *through* storms. Christianity isn't a refuge from the uncertainties & insecurities of the world. There are no safe places in life but we can find security with Jesus & a serenity that this world doesn't know & cannot give. We know that Jesus has done battle with the *strong man* & has won. He's in control of the savage storms & we have no reason to fear anything from nature or the supernatural, from life or death (Rom 8:31–39).<sup>13</sup> *Who is Jesus?* is the most important question you can answer. If you don't know who Jesus is, let me warn you, you'll be terrified when you meet Him face-to-face. But when you come to know Him as the Son of God through faith, you need fear no longer, for faith & fear cannot coexist. Who is this Man? He's the Lord of the storm. He is the Lord of death & the grave. Since He loves us & has purchased us with His own blood, He will never leave us nor forsake us, even when things look bleak & no hope is to be found. The wind & the waves obey this Man because He is Lord. He is our Lord. He is our God & we are His people.

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<sup>13</sup> Garland, p 200