

"Do You Still Not Have Faith?"

Technology. Progress. Mankind has made some incredible achievements over the last couple hundred years. We can cure all sorts of diseases with medical technology. We can create sources of light that are powered by the sun. We have computers and machines that can replace humans in all sorts of jobs. We've invented planes, cars, and boats, that take us wherever we want to go. Mankind has made all sort of advancements, solved all sorts of problems. And yet with all our technological advancements, one thing we've not been able to do is to control the weather - *or not*.

If you've followed any of the news surrounding the upcoming Olympics in China, you probably have heard about China's weather control department. The Chinese have pretty much promised to not have rain problems in Beijing during the Olympics. That's a rather bold claim since that will be during their rainy season.

But their bold claim is not as outrageous as it might first sound. China actually has a weather control department with some 1,500 people employed by it. Basically, the Chinese have a process where they shoot rockets up into the clouds, and deposit some sort of substance that causes the cloud to drop its rain. So, the idea is, if you see a large cloud approaching a city, say Beijing, you can intercept the cloud before it hits the city; shoot the rockets up into the clouds with anti-aircraft guns, get them to drop their water before they move over the city, and there you go - no rain over the city.

Now of course, this system by the Chinese, though reportedly more advanced than any American technology, is far from a perfect science. And yet, even if the Chinese do work out the kinks and find ways to have fairly reliable control of the weather, I hope you will still notice an infinite difference between human weather control and what Jesus does here in our passage for today. Man can learn about how the weather works and find ways to manipulate it, but he will never be able to speak forth the creative word that Jesus does here in order to cause the wind and sea to instantly submit in obedience.

And so I want us to consider today in this passage the importance of Jesus being able to control the wind and sea by the very word of his power. I want us to consider what it means for Jesus to have this power and authority. What does this tell us about who he is? Well, certainly, it points to his divinity. We'll see how this event shows forth that Jesus is indeed who Scripture presents: the eternal Son of God who has come in the flesh. He is God incarnate. I believe that truth stands out pretty glaringly in this passage, and so we will see that. But I also want us to consider the significance of this fact. What's the impact of this fact in our lives? If Jesus is God in the flesh, able to control wind and water, and every aspect of creation, what should that do to our faith? How should that affect our faith and how we respond to the trials that come in our lives? I want us to dive into this story here in Mark and find our own story here. I want us to see our own struggles of faith. For much like the disciples, we find ourselves in situations where we should respond in faith, having seen so much of Christ's power already in our lives, and yet we instead respond in fear and doubt. Instead of finding our peace and comfort in Christ, we begin to doubt and worry and get anxious. We wonder if God is really in control. And yet when such times come in our faith, Jesus' words call out to us. It is at those times, like with the disciples, that he asks, "Why are you fearful? Do you still not have faith?"

And so let's look at this passage for today. You'll notice that there are three main questions asked in this passage. And so we'll use that as our structure for looking at this passage. The first question comes in verse 38. The disciples wake Jesus and ask him in the midst of the great storm, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

The context for this first question brings us back to the beginning of this chapter. Jesus had been teaching to a multitude from a boat on the Sea of Galilee, which was a lake. The crowds were on the land, and Jesus taught from the boat. But now in our passage, verse 35 tells us that evening had come. Jesus tells his disciples to take him to the other side of the lake. He had probably been preaching all day to the crowds, and so was probably exhausted. I know when I stand up here for an hour I am pretty tired afterwards, so I can only imagine that Jesus was wiped out by the end of the day. And so it's not surprising that as soon as the boat heads toward deeper waters that we find that Jesus is fast asleep. Remember, that even though Jesus is the eternal Son of God, in the incarnation he took on human flesh - he had a human body that got tired and worn out. We see that here with Jesus being fast asleep.

And yet in verse 37, we see a problem arise. All of a sudden a great storm of wind arises, beating against the boat. The wind and water smash up against the boat. The boat even begins to take on some water because of the power of the storm. It was probably a pretty scary situation. From the disciples' perspective, everything probably seemed like chaos! And yet, Jesus was sleeping away. Verse 38 tells us that he was calmly asleep, with his head on a pillow.

This fact that Jesus was calmly sleeping away is representative of his overall calmness in this situation. The disciples who would frantically waken him in a moment are obviously not in this state. If you are frantic or stressed about something, you are not going to be calmly sleeping. Think about yourself - have you ever been really stressed or worried about something? It usually affects your sleep first. Someone who is stressed out and worried usually has trouble sleeping. Not Jesus here. He is calm.

And yet Jesus' peaceful sleep is violently interrupted by this question from the disciples. "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing," they ask. The disciples had to have been pretty worried by this point. Remember, several of them were professional fishermen, who fished on this very lake. The Sea of Galilee was known for its violent storms, so this wouldn't have been the first time they would have encountered one. In other words, this storm was probably *really* bad for the disciples to respond this way. It scared even the professionals. You know you're in trouble whenever the professional is scared about something. If you go to the doctor, and he has a worried look on his face when he comes in to give you the results of a test, then that is not a good sign.

Why did the disciples wake Jesus? Were they hoping that he could help? Maybe to some degree, though we have to be careful to not read too much positively into their faith at this point, because as we'll see, Jesus saw their reaction as a lack of faith. One thing that is clear from the disciples' language is that their question contained a rebuke against Jesus. They were chiding him, because from their perspective he was not concerned about their wellbeing. Again, contrast Jesus' calmness with the disciple's franticness.

And yet, in response to this rebuke by the disciples, Jesus responds first, so graciously, so mercifully, by solving the disciple's perceived need. He rebukes the wind and speaks to the sea according to verse 39. He commanded, "Peace. Be

still." Literally in the Greek, "Be quiet. Be silenced". Jesus speaks and the wind and the sea instantly respond. There are no Chinese weather control rockets involved here. No human technology. Just Jesus' simple command, and the wind and water instantly obey. They have heard their master. They have yielded to their creator.

And look at what the outcome is in verse 39. The "great" storm is transformed into a "great" calm. A great storm becomes a great calm. Jesus' calmness comes to the environment. The power of his word creates the very calmness he had lying there asleep on the boat; it creates that calmness in the sea around them.

This brings us to the second question in our passage. In verse 40, Jesus responds to the disciples with a question and rebuke of his own. I'll read from my own translation, "Why are you fearful? Do you still not have faith?" There's actually a text variant here in the Greek manuscript, with the bottom line being that some later manuscripts read, "How is it that you have no faith," instead of "Do you *still* not have faith." Effectively, the word "still" is replaced with the word "how". If you compare the major English translations you can easily see this in the newer versions that you use the older manuscripts. But I think the clear manuscript evidence supports the reading, "Do you *still* not have faith." The basic meaning of Jesus' rebuke remains the same in either translation, but I think the nuance with the word "still" makes this all the more stinging of a rebuke.

Basically, in this rebuke Jesus is identifying the disciple's fear with a lack of faith and trust in Jesus. If the disciples really understood who Jesus is, and if they really understood his mission, how could they be afraid? Surely if they knew the big picture, that Jesus had to suffer under the hands of men to atone for the sins of God's people, then they would realize that Jesus' life had to be preserved until then. This is not to mention all the miracles that Jesus had done in front of them already. They had seen Jesus' supernatural power time and time again, but evidently their faith in that power was not big enough. Surely they had some faith in Jesus, but it was not a large enough perspective. It was not a faith that was bearing fruit of peace and trust in Christ. Instead their faith was so meager that instead of having the calmness that Jesus had, they had fear. The text actually describes them as cowardly. That's another possible translation for the word for fearful in verse 40. Instead of being confident in faith, they were cowardly in fear.

That is why this word "still" is so significant. "Do you *still* not have faith?" The disciples had seen so much. They had received so much training and teaching as part of Jesus' inner circle. Even if they were legitimately concerned about their wellbeing, they could have at least waken Jesus and calmly asked for help. Of course, that's not what they did. They *still* did not have faith - at least not a big enough faith.

And even after Jesus calmed the wind and sea, their faith still was not where it needed to be. The instant response of the wind and the sea serves as a sort of foil to the disciples. Jesus' command to the waters, "Peace, be still," is exactly what the disciples themselves needed to do. They needed to be at peace. They needed to be still. Their words of rebuke to Jesus needed to be silenced and replaced with words of trust. The calmness of the sea that came in response to Jesus' word was the same response of calmness needed in the disciples. And yet Christ was not finished with the disciples. Their discipleship would continue. He would continue to grow them. His calmness would continue to be imparted to them as they grew in faith. Over time, God would grow in them spiritual fruit of faith, peace, and trust.

This leads us to the third question in this passage. In verse 41, we see the disciples respond to Jesus' rebuke with a final question in this passage. Verse 41 says, "And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!" This is an interesting response by the disciples. In some sense it shows progress in them, but in some sense it reaffirms Jesus' rebuke of them. Clearly their words show a growing faith. Clearly there is progress in them beginning to really recognize the full extent of who Jesus is and the authority he bears. Clearly they were surprised at Jesus' action. Both Matthew's and Luke's account of this event record that they *marveled* at what Jesus did here. It was pretty amazing what happened! And so certainly this miracle was part of the way Jesus was discipling them and training them. Jesus used this storm as an opportunity to minister to them.

And yet, look at what they are doing in this question. They are fearing, and they are raising a question of uncertainty about Jesus. Jesus rebuked them for their fear and lack of faith. Here they are again fearful and show uncertainty in their faith. Verse 41 says that they "feared exceedingly." In the Greek this is worded in such a way to show that they were *really* afraid. Now, this may have been a sort of godly fear, recognizing the greatness of Jesus, but it was still fear nonetheless. And though their question in verse 41 seems almost rhetorical, demanding a sort of obvious answer that Jesus must be God, it's still presented as a question and not as a confession of faith. Their question seems to beg us to see Jesus as God incarnate, but it's as if the disciples couldn't actually say that, as if the very notion seemed impossible to consider, while yet also impossible to deny in light of what just happened. Who could command the sea and wind like this, save God alone? And yet was Jesus not also a man, someone whom they just witnessed tire from a long day of preaching, so tired and exhausted that he soundly slept on the boat even while the sea billows roared. Who was this Jesus: man or God? Surely they were bewildered and perplexed. And yet though Jesus was clearly a man, his actions here in calming the storm demanded his divinity as well.

And that is exactly what we see in the Scriptures. A simple survey of Old Testament passages shows that it is God alone who is Lord over all the creation, including the wind and the water. We saw that in the Proverb we read earlier in the service. Listen to a few other verses:

- ESV Psalm 33:7 (Talking about God) He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses.
- ESV Psalm 77:16 When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; indeed, the deep trembled.
- ESV Job 12:15 (Job talking about God) If he withholds the waters, they dry up; if he sends them out, they overwhelm the land.
- Think about the Flood - God sent the flood, then afterwards promised to not judge the world in such a way again.
- Amos 4:13 says that the Lord God is the creator of the wind.
- ESV Psalm 107:25 For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. 26 They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight; 27 they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end. 28 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. 29 He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. 30 Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven.

All of these Old Testament references point to the fact that God is in control of the wind and sea - not man. We don't see in the Old Testament any man claiming to have authority over the creation like we see Jesus doing here. Even the prophets in the Old Testament who were God's instruments for certain miracles over nature - none of them claimed the authority by themselves. They each were merely obeying God's instructions for how to execute the miracle. Think about Moses and the parting of the Red Sea. That event is arguably one of the greatest miracles over nature in the Old Testament. If you look at the event in Exodus 14, it is very clearly the Lord who is giving Moses specific instructions on how to part the Red Sea. God tells Moses to lift up his hand over the sea. And then listen to Exodus 14:21: "Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided." Even in this great miracle over the wind and water that was done by Moses, it was not Moses power or authority that made it happen. It was not the word of Moses' power. It was the Lord's power.

A similar parting of the waters happened with Joshua at the Jordan River, the leader of God's people after Moses. That miracle was reminiscent of the miracle done through Moses. But again, that miracle was done by God's careful instruction to Joshua, and the credit belonged to God for the miracle.

Another Old Testament story that comes to mind is the story of Jonah. When Jonah is fleeing God by the way of ship, God causes a great storm to come upon the ship. The sea was in a great uproar. After the sailors cast lots to determine that the issue was with Jonah, Jonah confessed that he was in trouble with God and told them to throw him overboard. As soon as they did, the sea became calm. Again, the story of Jonah attributes all that work to God.

And so with Moses, Joshua, Jonah, and all the other prophets who performed miracles over nature in the Old Testament - all their power and authority was derived from God. They did not cause the miracles to happen by their own power. They were merely following God's instruction and God delighted to work through them. That is not what we see Jesus doing here. Jesus spoke by his own word and authority. Peace. Be still! And the waves and wind obeyed.

I hope all these Old Testament references drive you to a single conclusion. When the disciples asked, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" There can be only one answer. God. Jesus is God! Only God can control the wind and waves by his own power and word. Jesus is God. No matter how hard it was for the disciples to grasp how God could be in the flesh, the evidence was undeniable. This challenged their faith. It gave them much fear to consider who this man Jesus was before them. But clearly his power and authority was undeniable. Even the wind and waves submit to him.

Saints of God, we need to trust in Jesus. We need to look for that calmness that Jesus had. We need to look for the peace and stillness which he embodied. We need to "fear not"! In whatever trials that come our way, whatever "storms" may be in our life, we need to have faith and trust in our Lord.

And we can have this trust because of who Jesus is. As we have seen today, Jesus is God come in the flesh. This means that our Lord and Savior is God himself. That means that Jesus is in control of all things. This means that he knows what he is doing in our lives, even when we don't. If we are with Jesus, if Jesus is with us, why should we fear? Do we doubt that he is in control?

I think of verse 36 in our passage which says that there were other boats that went along side the boat that Jesus was in. Maybe there'd be concern about the storm if

you were in one of the other boats. But how could the disciples be afraid when Jesus was with them. If they knew who he was, how could they fear?

See, that really is the question. If you have faith in Jesus; if Jesus is with you, then you have reason to be calm and at peace. You have reason to trust. For we know the promises of Scripture, that if our life is hid in Christ, no matter what happens in this life, that ultimately our eternal fates are secure. Nothing in this world can separate us from the love of Christ. No peril in this life can thwart God's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. For on that final day, he will return to bring us into the final state of peace. He will bring us into the New Heavens and the New Earth, a place of the greatest calm we could ever imagine. A place without sorrow or trouble or pain. A place where there is no more perils or painful trials. A place where there will be no reason to fear, only reasons to rejoice in God's goodness.

And yet if Jesus is not with you, if he is not your Lord and Savior, then I think you do have reason to fear. For if peril strikes you in this life, you might die physically. And if you die without Christ in this life, you will live without him in the next. You will suffer eternally the consequences of your rejection of Christ. He will reject you, and you will suffer under the great storm of God's wrath for all eternity. That will make the perils in this life look tame in comparison.

And so I exhort us all today, to place our trust in Jesus. Place our hope and confidence in him. For, if we are Christian, this should affect how we respond to troubles in our life. Remember Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose." I know Pastor Miller reminded you of that passage many times. If we really believe that passage, how can we respond with worry and stress and fear when troubles come? We don't live in a bubble. We know that people, Christians included, face troubles in their lives. But if we really believe that Christ is in control; of everything; of every aspect of our life, and of this world, how can we fret? How can we doubt? How can we fear? Do you really believe Romans 8:28? Do you really have faith in our Lord?

I think the reality is that most of us can affirm this truth fairly easily during the good times in our life. During the good times, we remember so clearly the many blessings Christ has given us. We remember so clearly how Christ has taken such good care of us. And yet the difficulty becomes when a real tough hardship arises in our life. I know it might sound cliché to talk about the "storms" in your life, but we do have those. We have those "storms" that just push to the point of breaking. It's at those intense challenging moments where the storms feel like they are going to overwhelm us. At those times we might be tempted to fret. We might be tempted to fear and worry. But at those times, we need to ask ourselves the question Jesus asked the disciples. Why are you afraid? Do you *still* not have faith?

Still. Oh how we should believe and trust. We have seen so much. We have tasted so much of God's goodness. And yet we must confess, that at the hard times in our lives, our faith can falter. We can *still* not have the faith that we ought.

Saints of God, what is your breaking point? What storms do you weather well and which ones push you to the edge? Whatever they are, I call you to confess it today to God. Confess to him your lack of faith in these areas, and ask him to strengthen you. And when you do encounter storms in life, turn to Jesus. Turn to him, not to complain; not to grumble; not to charge him with wrongdoing. Turn to

him for comfort. Turn to him for peace in the storm. Turn to him for strength and encouragement. Turn to him and say, Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.

And surely our Lord Jesus will uphold us. Even when the disciples' wrongly rebuked Jesus in our passage, Jesus still mercifully calmed the storm. How much more will he carry us through all the storms of this life when we call to him for help. He is so faithful: the author and finisher our faith. Praise be to him. Amen.

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