

**Mark:
Master and Commander:
The Far Side of the Sea of Galilee**

Mark 4:35-41

By [Dr. Derek Thomas](#)

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Please be seated. Turn with me once again to the gospel of Mark, and we come now to the final story at the end of chapter 4, a brief story that is well known to us all of Jesus calming a storm on the Sea of Galilee. No, I haven't seen it...*Master and Commander*...the far side of the Sea of Galilee. And the story is one that brings to our attention in a most forcible way the answer to the question that comes to us as we read the gospel of Mark from beginning to end: Who is Jesus Christ? As we read the story, let's give our hearts and thoughts to that question. But before we do so, let's ask God for His blessing. Let's pray.

Our God and our Father, this is Your word. You've caused it to be written. Every word, every syllable, every jot and tittle comes as a consequence of Your out-breathing. We pray, Holy Spirit, that You would cause it to be made known and understood to us. Help us, we pray, to hide it within our hearts that we might not sin against you. Help us to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest for Your glory, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now let us hear the word of God.

35 And on that day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side." 36 And leaving the multitude, they took Him along with them, just as He was, in the boat; and other boats were with Him. 37 And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up.

38 And He Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" 39 And being aroused, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. 40 And He said to them, "Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith?" 41 And they became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

Amen. May God bless to us the reading of His holy and inerrant word.

You think you know Jesus. You have a relationship with Him. He is your Savior. He is your Lord. He is your friend. You've talked to Him. You commune with Him. He comforts you when you're sad. He provides for you when you're in need. He reassures you when you're doubting. He's always there when you call upon Him. He meets your needs. He does what's best for you and then something happens. And it isn't what Jesus is supposed to do. You find yourself in a storm. Some of you tonight are in a storm. This week has been a storm and nothing about it makes any sense. Do you know John Newton's prayer, "A Prayer Answered by Crosses"?

I ask'd the Lord, that I might grow / In faith, and love, and ev'ry grace,
Might more of his salvation know, And seek more earnestly his face. 'Twas
he who taught me thus to pray, And he, I trust has answer'd pray'r; But it
has been in such a way, As almost drove me to despair. I hop'd that in
some favour'd hour, At once he'd answer my request: And by his love's
constraining pow'r, Subdue my sins, and give me rest. Instead of this he
made me feel / The hidden evils of my heart; And let the angry pow'rs of
hell / Assault my soul in ev'ry part. Yea more, with his own hand he
seem'd / Intent to aggravate my woe; Cross'd all the fair designs I
schem'd, Blasted my gourds, and laid me low. Lord, why is this, I trembling
cry'd, Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death? 'Tis in this way,' the Lord
reply'd, 'I answer pray'r for grace and faith. These inward trials I employ,
From self and pride to set thee free; And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
That thou mayst seek thy all in me.'

If you don't know that poem, that hymn of John Newton's, do a Google search. Get it on the web; print it out; stick it in your Bibles. I'm telling you it will help you through many a trial. That's what this story tonight is about.

In the Greek text—not so clearly in the English text—but in the Greek text Mark implies three “greats”: There is a great storm in verse 37; there is a great calm in verse 39; and there is a great fear in verse 41. And I want to use those markers as though Mark gave that as a gift to preachers: a great storm, a great calm, and a great fear.

I. A great storm

A great storm—Jesus tells the disciples... You remember what He's been doing? He's been preaching, teaching the disciples but also a great crowd. He's on a boat on the Sea of Galilee. There's a great crowd on the shoreline. He's just taught them in parables. And now He says to His disciples, 'Let's go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.' And Mark tells us they took Him just as He was. That's to say, He was already in the boat and He left without getting out of the

boat. The disciples joined Him in this boat, and away they went and other boats followed. This boat is a vessel that could be of any size, but it's probably a vessel that would contain maybe 12 to 15 people. And despite what some commentators seem to think, it probably had no sails. The surface of the Sea of Galilee is roughly 600 feet below sea level. It's surrounded by mountains, all of which cause winds to descend quickly, sharply on to the Sea of Galilee. To this day, a storm can arise on the surface of the Sea of Galilee within what seems to be minutes.

Jesus asked His disciples—no, *told* His disciples—to get into the boat and to make their way to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus has led His disciples into trouble. Jesus has led His disciples into trouble. This Jesus whom they have begun to follow, this gentle Jesus meek and mild—at His request, in obedience to His command they find themselves in trouble. This isn't a case of someone disobeying the Lord and the judgment of God comes down upon them. We understand that. Many commentators think that Mark is telling the story with the story of Jonah as a kind of template. And you remember the story of Jonah? The storm comes because of Jonah's disobedience. God has caught up with Jonah who's running away from the will of God. But that's not the case here: They're doing the will of God. They are obeying Jesus and they find themselves in trouble. We can understand the story of Jonah. Every fiber of our being echoes with that. We say, don't we, when we find ourselves in trouble, "What have I done to deserve this?" because in some form, in some way this must be some act of judgment upon me? But that's not the case here. The disciples were doing what Jesus had commanded them. You can imagine Peter, James, John saying to themselves, 'You know, if we become disciples of Jesus we can leave this hum drum existence of fishing on the Sea of Galilee behind us. Life is going to be good with the Messiah,' the One that Israel had hoped would be their leader and Savior. But no, life is full of storms and trouble and there's a cross to bear. "I hop'd that in some favour'd hour, At once he'd answer my request: And by his love's constraining pow'r, Subdue my sins, and give me rest instead of this."

Yes, instead of this Jesus leads us into storms. That's where some of you find yourselves tonight. You have been faithfully following Jesus Christ. You've been reading His word. You've been implementing it in your lives. Yes, there are always failures and shortcomings. No one is perfect but as an act of obedience to Jesus, as an act of discipleship to Jesus...trouble has come unsolicited, "out of the blue," as we say. Can't you hear their anger? It's more than frustration: it's anger. Jesus is *sleeping*—think of it—in this boat, in the middle of this storm. He's at the stern of the boat. He's sleeping on the pillow as Mark calls it. It looks as though Jesus is, well, indifferent, indifferent to their plight, that He doesn't care. Isn't it a remarkable thing, by the way, to note that Jesus is sleeping, that the Son of God, the divine Messiah gets tired? And it's that kind of sleep that nothing can awaken Him, that "sound sleep of the just," as we some times call it.

Can you hear the question? Let's get back to the storm. Can you hear their

question? And it's a pointed question... 'Master, Master, don't You care?' My friends, let's be honest tonight. Have you never ever thought that? When you find yourself in trouble, when your family is in disarray, when your future and dreams come crashing down before you, when your hopes and aspirations are gone— have you never said or thought, 'Jesus, don't you care. Don't you care?' What shocking words and yet, my friends, I'm sure we've all thought it. He was in the world but He cared. He was in the boat and He cares.

What's going on here? Let's dig a little deeper. Let's learn the lesson that Jesus will put you in places that will tempt you to think that He doesn't care. That's it! That's the lesson. Jesus will put you in places that will tempt you to think that He doesn't care. He's asleep, and, well, He doesn't know what's going on or He can't be bothered or He's got much more important things to think about and care about than you.

Do you remember some of Job's questions? They're shocking questions: 'Do you think I'm made of stone or metal? If life is short, does it also have to be miserable? What did I ever do to become the target of your arrows? You are the One who created me so why are you destroying me? Why do You hide Your face and consider me Your enemy?' Remember Martha? Mary and Martha? You remember her words to Jesus when Jesus is in town and in the home, and Mary is sitting at Jesus feet enjoying this glorious Bible study? And Martha says to Jesus, 'Lord it's not fair that I am the one doing all of the work. Don't you care that she left me to do all this? Tell her to do something. Don't you care?' My friends, yes, Jesus will lead you into contexts and into situations where you may be tempted to say that: "Lord, don't you care?"

What's going on here, of course, is a test. "These inward trials I employ, from self and pride to set thee free; and break thy schemes of earthly joy, that thou mayst seek thy all in Me," Newton says. This is the way the Master sifts us. This is the way the Master discerns what is dross from that which is genuine. This is the way our Savior builds us up, encourages and challenges and motivates our faith: He puts you through the fires. He sends you through the storms. He brings into your life things that you wish were not there.

"God has so ordered the church from the very beginning," Calvin says, "that death is the way to life and the cross the way to victory." And that's what's going on here. There's a great storm. My friends, is that where you are tonight? I know that's where some of you are tonight, in the midst of a great storm. You're in that boat and that winds are howling and the sea is coming into this little boat. And it looks as though this boat is going to sink and you're tempted to get a hold of Jesus and say to Him, "Lord, don't you care?" And He's testing you. Do you understand that? He's testing you.

II. A great calm

There's a great storm but there's also a great calm. "Peace," Jesus says, speaks to the wind and then He speaks to the sea and He says, "Peace, be still." The word in Greek means "to be muzzled." It's like putting a muzzle on an angry dog that's growling and you don't trust this dog and you muzzle it. Jesus had used this word before in speaking to some of the demons, "Be muzzled! Be quiet!" Do you remember the English King, King Canute, standing at the shoreline saying to the waves, the tidal waves, "Stop!"? What a buffoon He was. What an ignoramus He was...and yet Jesus is doing exactly the same thing here. Can you see Him in the boat in this storm, Master and Commander of the far side of the Sea of Galilee, and He's speaking to the wind and He's commanding the waves to be still? He only has to speak—isn't that beautiful? He only has to utter a word, a sovereign word, a divine word, the word of a Creator, the word of One who holds the universe in the palms of His hands, "Peace, be still."

Who is this man? Who is this man who is sleeping in the stern of the boat from tiredness, from exhaustion from the ministry in which He's been engaged and now He's commanding the wind and the waves? What kind of being is He? Think about what He's been teaching them...that He is the King of a new kingdom that He was going to establish. Could this be true, that from this man would come something that would transform the whole world?

If ever there was a time for Jesus to show who He really was it was now. He'd given these parables of the kingdom: That the kingdom is like a mustard seed, a small tiny seed that grows and grows and grows to be the greatest plant, the greatest tree in all the world. It's like sowing a seed at night and then going to bed and getting up in the morning and a crop has appeared, and it has come to fruition and it's none of your doing. You sowed the seed but the coming to fruition was not of you; it was of God. How is this kingdom going to come? There were all kinds of answers. Go down south from Galilee to Jerusalem; ask King Herod. He believed in the kingdom. He knew his Old Testament. He believed that the kingdom was coming and he was preparing for it by building palaces and fortresses and arming himself and making alliances with Rome, so that when the kingdom would come he would be in the best possible position to take advantage of it. Go down further south to the Qumran district at the edge of the Dead Sea. They believed in the kingdom. They had been preparing for it. They had huddled themselves, secluded themselves in a kind of monastic society, copying manuscripts of the Old Testament, preparing themselves for the coming of the kingdom because when the kingdom would come it would have absolutely nothing to do with the world and they were separating themselves from the world. Go further south again, past Qumran and all the way down almost to the end of the Dead Sea to Masada. They too, another sect, the Sikari—They had built a fortress on the top of a mountain and they were preparing for the kingdom and they were sharpening their swords, and they were making themselves holy and they were preparing themselves for insurrection. And Jesus is talking about the kingdom, a kingdom which centers around Him, around His words, His gospel,

His revelation of His heavenly Father, His calling of this tiny band of disciples—fisherman, tax collector, a converted member of the opposition.

Could it be true and Jesus is showing them here in this boat—? He's giving them a little glimpse of who He really is? He's told them that through Him the kingdom of God would come, the kingdom that is within you, the kingdom that in a sense is not of this world. 'And if you don't believe,' He's saying to His disciples. 'If you don't believe that a carpenter from Nazareth can do all of this, then watch and learn. Watch and learn.' And He speaks to the wind, and He speaks to the waves and He says, "Peace, be still." Now either He's a complete lunatic, which is what His family thought that He was, or else He is God, He's the Lord of glory. That's what He's saying with this gesture, this miracle in the boat. He's saying, 'I'm the Lord of the universe. I can command the wind and the waves.' And the wind ceased, or in Eugene Peterson's translation, "the wind ran out of breath." Campbell Morgan once said, "Granted the truth of the first verse of the Bible, there is no difficulty in believing what Jesus does here. He is the Creator; He is the sustainer of all things. It is nothing to Him to speak to the wind and the waves and to bring a calm."

Now what this disclosed was the weakness of their faith. Mark says that Jesus said to them that they had no faith. Matthew and Luke, who also record this story, interpret that and say that what Jesus actually said was that they had *weak faith* or *little faith*. It's possible to be a believer...it's possible to trust in Jesus Christ, but our faith is weak in a moment of crisis, for our faith to fail us to be in Jesus' company. It's one thing to have faith here but to be in Jesus' company we would be different. And here it is, these disciples, they're in Jesus' company; they're in the boat with Him...and their faith failed them. I'm sure they lay awake at night afterwards saying to themselves, 'How stupid we were. Imagine it! If only we could undo that, if only we had just poked Jesus and said, "It's time, Master. It's time to do it now."' And echoing in their minds were those words, 'Don't you care?' I'm sure at 3:00 in the morning those words echoed in the hollow of their minds and brought them great sense of shame and reminded them of the weakness of their faith.

In the storms, my friends, that you are passing through tonight, you think He's taking a nap and doesn't care for you? This Jesus who laid down His life for you, this Jesus who was scourged and beaten and crucified and nailed to a Roman gibbet, this Jesus who cried, "My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Do you think for one moment that He doesn't care? He cares for you. He cares for you. He's in the boat with you my friend. He's right there in the middle of the storm with you. There's a hymn...oh, it's a little sentimental ...written in 1901 by Frank Grafe, who had been passing through a storm of his own...Part of those beautiful words of 1 Peter chapter 5 in verse 7, "He cares for you." He cares for you.

"Does Jesus care when my heart is panged too deeply for mirth or song, as the burdens press and the cares distress and the way grows weary and long? Oh

yes, He cares. I know He cares. His heart is touched with my grief. When the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Savior cares. Does Jesus care when my way is dark with a nameless dread and fear? As the daylight fades into deep night shades, does He care enough to be near? Oh yes, He cares. I know He cares. His heart is touched with my grief. When the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Savior cares. Does Jesus care when I've said goodbye to the dearest on earth to me, and my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks is it ought to Him, does He see? Oh yes, He cares. I know He cares. His heart is touched with my grief. When the days are weary and the long nights dreary, I know my Savior cares."

III. A great fear

There's a great storm and a great peace, but in the third place there is a great fear—yes, a great fear. They had been afraid of the storm but now they're afraid in a different sense, because now they are aware that standing in the boat with them...the One whom they have come to trust, the One in whom they have placed their confidence, the One that they've begun to follow, the One that they have imagined and come to believe is the Messiah of Old Testament promise, the One standing in the boat with them is more than just the man. They wouldn't doubt for one minute that He was a man. They had just seen Him sleeping. They had to wake Him from His sleep...but He's more than a man. No man commands winds and waves standing in the boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, in a boat, perhaps, they have been in many times fishing. They are suddenly conscious this is One who is greater than all of them, greater than anyone they have ever seen before. This is the Son of God! This is the Lord of glory! This is the second person of the trinity. This is Jesus Christ the Creator of the whole universe! Standing in the boat with them is the One who holds in the palms of His hands the entire universe. Standing in the boat, my friends, is glory itself.

Friend, you're about to go to Mexico and Peru and Myanmar... Wherever else you're going...I can't remember where else you're going. Uganda? Tell them this...tell them this message. Take this Jesus with you, this Jesus who is God, this Jesus who is Lord, this Jesus to whom nothing is an obstacle. You go to do a hard work. Some of you are going to do an extraordinarily hard work. I couldn't believe the description that Brister was giving, to speak the word of the gospel to the dead and perishing of this world, but you go in the name of this person, this Lord, this Master, this Commander of the far side of the Sea of Galilee. When you're over there and you begin to doubt for one minute, for one second, what it is that you're doing, remember it's not in your strength that you're doing it. You do it in the strength of this One, this Lord, this Savior, this Messiah, this King, this King of Kings, this Lord of Lords who stood in a boat on the Sea of Galilee and said, "Peace." If He can do that, my friends, He can turn the hearts of prostitutes and homosexuals and whoever and whatever it is that you come across in your mission work this summer. What a great Savior we have. Let's pray together.

Our God and our Father, we bless You for this wonderful story of Jesus. We believe it to be true. We pray for one who goes to California this week, that You this sovereign Jesus would work in his body. We thank You Lord for the truth of the gospel, that with You nothing is impossible. Bless it to our hearts, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please stand and receive the Lord's benediction. Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

A Guide to the Evening Service

The Theme of the Service

Storms! The storms of life familiar to us all—this is the theme of tonight's service. Set around the story of Jesus' encounter with a storm on the Sea of Galilee, all the hymns this evening have this theme in common.

The Hymns and Spiritual Songs

Eternal Father, Strong to Save

In America, *Eternal Father, Strong to Save* is often called the *Navy Hymn*, because it is sung at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. It is also sung on ships of the British Royal Navy and has been translated into French. It was the favorite hymn of President Franklin Roosevelt and was sung at his funeral in Hyde Park, New York, April 1945. The Navy Band played it in 1963 as President John Kennedy's body was carried up the steps of the U.S. Capitol to lie in state. Roosevelt served as Secretary of the Navy, and Kennedy was a PT boat commander in World War II.

O Safe to the Rock That is Higher Than I *Hiding in Thee* was written in Moravia, New York, in 1876, by William O. Cushing. "It must be said of this hymn," he wrote, "that it was the outgrowth of many tears, many heart-conflicts and soul-yearnings, of which the world can know nothing. The history of many battles is behind it. But the occasion which gave it being was the call of Mr. Sankey. He said, 'Send me something new to help me in my Gospel work.' A call from such a source, and for such a purpose, seemed a call from God. I so regarded it, and prayed: 'Lord, give me something that may glorify Thee.' It was while thus waiting that *Hiding in Thee* pressed to make itself known. Mr. Sankey called forth the tune, and by his genius gave the hymn wings, making it useful in the Master's work."

A Shelter in the Time of Storm

The hymn, written by Vernon Charlesworth, was set to music by Ira Sankey. Sankey comments, "I found this hymn in a small paper published in London, called *The Postman*. It was said to be a favorite song of the fisherman on the north coast of England, and they were often heard singing it as they approached their harbors in the time of storm. As the hymn was set to a weird minor tune, I decided to compose one that would be more practical, one that could be more easily sung by the people."

The Sermon

If you are a believer, you must reckon on having your share of sickness and pain, of sorrow and tears, of losses and crosses, of deaths and bereavements, of partings and separations, of vexations and disappointments, so long as you are in the body. Christ never undertakes that you shall get to heaven without these. He has undertaken that all who come to Him shall have all things pertaining to life and godliness; but He has never undertaken that He will make them prosperous, or rich, or healthy, and that death and sorrow shall never come to their family.

So wrote Bishop Ryle over a century ago in a book that is still reckoned as one of the top ten of Christian Classics (J. C. Ryle, *Holiness, The Ruler of the Waves*, James Clarke and Co., London 1956, p.198).

In the old blue edition of *Trinity Hymnal*, there was a hymn by Mary Ann Baker (a member of the Temperance Society in Chicago at the close of the nineteenth century) called *Master, The Tempest is Raging*. It was always difficult to sing, but wonderfully exciting all the same. One of its verses went like this:

"Carest Thou not that we perish? How canst Thou lie asleep,
When each moment so madly is threatening a grave in the angry deep?"
"The winds and the waves shall obey My will, Peace be still!
Whether the wrath of the storm-tossed sea
Or demons, or men or whatever it be,
No waters can swallow the ship where lies
The Master of ocean or earth or sky.
They all shall sweetly obey My will,
Peace be still." (Mary A. Baker)

As we study tonight's passage, let us pray for that "peace" in the midst of the storms of life.

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