Mark Lesson 13 (2022)

**JESUS CAN CONTROL THE STORM**

*(Faith or Fear?)*

Mark 4:35-41

Key Verse: 4:40

“He said to his disciples, ‘Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?’”

During the last few weeks, we have learned that Jesus spoke to people about the mystery of God’s kingdom only through parables. It was not to block them from knowing the truth but to stir curiosity in them (4:9, 12, 22-24, 33-34). Last week, through the Parable of the Growing Seed, we learned that God’s kingdom grows in us by itself regardless (26-29), and the Parable of the Mustard Seed taught us that God’s kingdom would grow to be impressively large in God’s time, providing enough livelihood for all people in the world (30-34). Jesus had a great vision for the future of his messianic kingdom when the reality was very dark and negative in his time.

In 4:35-5:43, we will see how Jesus demonstrated his divine power in four miracles: over nature (4:35-41), over demons (5:1-20), over illness (5:21-34), and even death (5:35-43). These miracles reveal that Jesus is not just a mere human, but he is God, fully divine. Yet, people didn’t recognize who he really was. So he demonstrated his divinity in these miracles to show who he was and that God’s kingdom is already here on earth through his presence.

In today’s passage, Jesus’ disciples, facing the hurricane-like storm in Galilee, panicked even though they were on board with him in the same boat. Jesus demonstrated his divine power by calming the story. After managing the storm, Jesus rebuked his disciples for their lack of faith, saying, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” The miracle in today’s passage is simple but a real story. And it’s also an illustration of human life. We all face storms unexpectedly in our lives, regardless. Today’s miracle clearly shows that Jesus is able to calm any severe storm in our lives. And what matters is not necessarily his ability but our confidence in him.

Let us first think about the content of today’s miracle. Look at verses 35-36. “That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, ‘Let us go over to the other side.’ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.” The phrase “that day when evening came” indicates this event occurred right after Jesus taught the crowd the parables while sitting on the boat, probably all day long. Now that evening had come, Jesus told his disciples that they should cross over to the eastern side of the lake, which was a remote and less populated area. The disciples seemed delighted to hear what Jesus said, hoping they could leave the demanding crowd behind and have some time to relax. So, as soon as they heard him saying, “Let’s go,” they took Jesus just as he was in the boat.

Many of the disciples were skilled fishermen in Galilee, so they must have known how to sail the boat. As they rowed their boat, the gentle breeze embraced them, and the lake's freshwater splashed and sparked along the boat under the moonlight. Numerous stars began to reflect on the lake, and the disciples felt relaxed and began to sing a chorus, *“I will follow Him. Follow him wherever he may go. And near him, I always will be. For nothing can keep me away. He is my destiny.”* (From “Sister Act”) It was a beautiful prelude to their vacation.

However, their happy and peaceful boat riding didn’t last long. Look at verse 37. “A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.” Lake Galilee was notorious for sudden storms and unpredictable weather due to its unique geological condition, located 600 feet below sea level and surrounded by highlands. I am sure the disciples were aware of it. Yet, none of them predicted to face a storm that night. They probably assumed they would never have to face a terrible storm as long as Jesus was on board. But their assumptions were wrong. It churned up strong and high waves with hurricane-level wind gusts, lightning, and thunder. They were in great danger of drowning. The disciples tried to steer the boat, but it was impossible to control. They were terrified and panicked.

What was Jesus doing at that time? Look at verse 38a. “Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion.” Oh my! Jesus slept during the severe storm, perhaps even snoring loudly (Pic#1). See the contrast between Jesus and his disciples. The fact that Jesus could sleep amid such a strong storm shows his physical exhaustion, another indication of his full humanity. Jesus was God, yet he was also a man. Many people have sleep problems due to anxiety. But it would be wonderful if we could sleep peacefully despite many trials.

Yet, when the terrified disciples saw him still sleeping, they assumed he didn’t care about them. So they woke him and said, ‘Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” (38b) We see that the disciples were upset. In their anger, they said to Jesus, *“Teacher, why don’t you get up and do something.”* They rebuked Jesus for sleeping during the storm, accusing him of being irresponsible.

What did Jesus do? Look at verse 39. “He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.” Wow! It’s unbelievable that such a severe storm subsided at the simple command of Jesus. Everything turned to normal and became quiet.

When I was in college, my father tried building a 900-meter-long embankment by the seashore to block the seawater and make pasture and farmland. It was a big project. But one summer day in 1974, a strong typhoon raised the high tides over the bank. The bank could have collapsed anytime as the water level increased every minute. My father, who was not a believer then, knelt and prayed to God. Then he saw that the water level suddenly decreased, although it was supposed to keep going up for the next two minutes. My father said it was God’s miracle. After this event, my father began acknowledging God’s existence and reading the Bible.

Of course, such a miracle doesn’t always happen. But miracles do happen when God decides to do so. Look at verse 41. Witnessing what had happened to the storm, Jesus’ disciples were again terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” Through this miracle, the disciples experienced God’s miracle firsthand for the first time. And they began to consider him more than just a man. Indeed, Jesus is more than just a man. He is God Almighty.

Look at verse 40. “He said to his disciples, ‘Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?’” After subsiding the storm, Jesus didn’t go back to sleep. Instead, he turned his attention to his disciples. Interestingly, we notice that Jesus woke up not because of the strong storm but because of his disciples’ panic. Actually, in their panicky reaction, they scolded Jesus, saying, *“Teacher. Why don’t you wake up and do something!”* They indirectly criticized him as if he was out of touch and powerless. Their panicky reaction was understandable, yet it was a sheer expression of their poor faith in Jesus.

Jesus knew their faith should be better as the future leaders and shepherds of God’s flock. So, to help them grow their faith, he rebuked them by saying, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

Here, Jesus contrasts fear and faith. It’s because the opposite of faith is not unbelief but fear. The disciples had seen so much that Jesus had done. They had seen numerous miracles, healing the sick and driving out demons. They had witnessed the demonstration of his divine power, yet they allowed fear to take over during the crisis. After all, there was no need for them to fear anything. Because Jesus told them they should go over to the other side of the lake, he was on board with them. So, they should’ve remained calm in all circumstances, holding on to Jesus’ words of command and promises. I know it sounds a bit unrealistic. But it’s true.

It’s not easy to remain calm when life storms hit us. It’s natural for us to be anxious when life storms hit us. The storms of life often come to us unexpectedly, sometimes severely, through financial, medical, professional, emotional, mental, and relational crises. We also wonder why life storms come into our lives. Well, there are several possible reasons for it.

***First, some life storms are the result of our disobedience and sin.*** It’s like when we are lazy, don’t study, and get poor report cards. Galatians 6:7 and 8 state, “Don’t be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit.” (NLT)

***Second, God also causes life storms to discipline his beloved children.***  Many people believe that God is love. Yes. But they often fail to acknowledge that God’s love is not always sweet. It’s often tough and challenging. God, our Father, disciplines his loving children for their good. Hebrews 12:11 states, “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

Whatever kind of life storms we may face, they make us anxious and sometimes panic. Yet, it’s indispensable to surrender ourselves entirely to God, the ultimate power and authority.

1 Corinthians 10:13 states, “We all experience times of testing, which is normal for every human being. But God will be faithful to you. He will screen and filter the severity, nature, and timing of every test and trial you face so that you can bear it. And each test is an opportunity to trust him more, for along with every trial, God has provided for you a way of escape that will bring you out of it victoriously.” (TPT)

“Having no faith” means having no trust in him who is in control over all things. Facing all kinds of storms and challenges locally and globally, such as a prolonged pandemic, wars in Ukraine, strange and dangerous weather patterns due to global warming, economic downturns, and increased poverty, injustice, and violence across the globe, we even wonder if God still is in control over all things. ***If he is, why does he allow certain things to happen, and why doesn’t he end evil things in the world?*** We don’t understand why it is and why it isn’t. Things are pretty uncertain, insecure, and unpredictable. One of the prominent scientists said that the end of the world would come within 80 years. It’s pretty shocking, but I am not surprised considering what is happening worldwide.

We also have personal challenges and storms in life we cannot avoid day after day. Many people have become chronically anxious, probably more than ever in history. What shall we do? Should we remain anxious or put out confidence in God Almighty? Well, we may never be able to avoid being anxious. But if we allow ourselves to stay worried and fearful, the outcome of our lives will be unproductive and even harmful. The greatest weapon of our enemy, the devil, is fear. The devil may not be able to destroy us directly. But fear makes us self-destructive. The degree of our faith increases as we continue to overcome our fear, no matter how small it is.

Fear and faith are not mutually inclusive. Fear is looking at the storm, while faith is looking at the savior Jesus. Fear is looking at the circumstance, while faith is looking at God Almighty. So, we need to fix our eyes on Jesus in all circumstances. Let Jesus be on board with us. We have a wonderful Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, whom we can always trust. When we put our trust in him, we can overcome any fear because he is in control over all things, including the storms of life. Often fear hides behind pride. We are reluctant to acknowledge our fear because of our pride. But unless we admit it, it will have a grip on us. But fear loses its grip on us if we identify it and bring it to Jesus. Jesus said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid. Why do you still have no faith?” Before closing the sermon, I want us to read Philippians 4:6 and 7. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Let us choose faith, not fear.