

January 30, 2011

## *Scariest than Death*

Mark 4:35-41

### INTRODUCTION

What is fear? What does it mean to be afraid? That may seem like an easy question to answer. In spite of those ridiculous ‘No Fear’ stickers still on cars, everyone is afraid of a few things, even if our culture has given you a little bit of space and a little bit of time to avoid some of the most obvious terrors. Some people live at one extreme and are afraid of everything, even though they are (physically) safer than any people who have ever lived. Others know that, but then forget that the greatest dangers still apply to everyone and live in a kind of fantasy that our modern world has protected them from these things. Both types are out of touch with reality. But we have to see how. The type of person on both of these extremes has failed to see God as the God that He is. The people who encountered Jesus on earth were no different, but it is amazing what perspective the Lord brings when He draws near.

- STORM
- PEACE
- TERROR

**The Big Idea** is that a holy God in the flesh is the sum of our all fears and the source of real peace.

### DOCTRINE

#### I. STORM

##### A) Storms are Ordained

1. There are five details given by Mark that speak of the intentionality of the real author of this story: It was the end of that same day that was filled with all of the parables (35a); He was in a rush to get across (35b); He wanted to leave the crowd (36a); Something about him was unnatural to have in the boat—*just as he was* (36b); *and other boats were with him* (36c).

This has intentionality written all over it. Surely there was another way to get rest, but it seemed that Jesus had more in mind than simply a good night's sleep. The phrase "just as he was" is odd if it were natural for Jesus to be on the sea at night. He was not a fisherman by trade, as a few of his disciples were. While the other boats don't seem to play any role, they at least highlight his following. Now what role does God play? Throughout the Scriptures we see that, "He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth, who makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses" [Ps. 135:7], and "stormy wind (is) fulfilling his word!" [Ps. 148:8].

2. Let us also remember that who Jesus is before this account doesn't change throughout this account: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" [Heb. 13:8]; "in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" [Col. 2:9]. And, since we just saw how Jesus is the One that Isaiah spoke of in the prophecy about blinding and hardening, when we move back to the beginning of the sixth chapter [cf. 6:1-5], we should note that this holy One of Israel is also the Son of God. So Jesus is fully God. One teacher from the Word of Faith movement used this episode to argue that Jesus is not one with God since the Bible says that God never sleeps, and here we see Jesus plainly asleep. Now since he never uttered the exact words "Jesus is not God," Mr. Dollar avoided heresy—at least the way that our overly-sensitive culture defines it—but the dramatic pause and building laughter did the trick. Regardless of such ignorant statements, do we honestly think that the Father who designed every detail of the agonies of Calvary, as well as that dangerous ride inside the womb of Mary on the back of a donkey to Bethlehem, did not also carefully plan every element of this storm?

As the Puritan hymn-writer Isaac Watts sang,

There's not a plant or flower below,  
But makes Thy glories known;  
And clouds arise and tempests blow,  
By order from Thy throne.<sup>1</sup>

## B) Sudden Death Storm

1. *And a great windstorm arose (37a)*. Galilean sea storms are notorious for being sudden. Even the most experienced modern fisherman will tell you that because of the gusts coming east from the Mediterranean there can be violent winds and waves that come out of nowhere.

---

<sup>1</sup> Isaac Watts, "I Sing the Mighty Power of God," 1715

2. This sudden danger is like the jaws of death and hell: *and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling (37b)*. The wind and waves arose and was breaking into the boat and it was already filling up. Such is the case as death approaches. And notice that even before death ever seems to approach, that it is only when fearful objects draw close that we begin to cry out to God. Only when the disciples couldn't find enough buckets to keep this sea out of the boat did they wake up the Teacher who, otherwise, they would have dismissed as lacking expertise in this area. And that is exactly the way we treat Jesus, until He kindly brings real danger near to awaken us from our superficial fears.

## II. PEACE

### A) Christ's Position of Strength, Man's Position of Weakness

1. The full humanity and full deity of Jesus are both on display here in this account: *But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion (38a)*. This was real sleep that Jesus had because He was a real Man who experienced real physical weariness. One thing Jesus' nap accomplished was to further subject the disciples to their horrific experience. The more chaos and danger they went through, the more it would resemble their greatest danger. So this was a real nap, not something that He fakes only in order to subject them to the test of their own weakness. Still it did achieve that purpose, so that his grace was working perfectly through purely natural means. Yes, normally, the physical nature of the sea would have destroyed the physical nature of his body: just as the physical nails really did pierce his physical body. But, as Calvin comments, "his divinity watched over him."<sup>2</sup>

2. God's own people grumble to him. It seems to us sometimes as if God is not awake to our most gut-wrenching circumstances. *And they woke him and (38b)*, in Luke's Gospel, they are only shown to make a desperate prayer: "Master, Master, we are perishing!" [8:24]. Here they question the intentions of his heart. And don't you recognize your own heart in this complaint, when they *said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (38c)*. Don't you care! We do not only suspect that the Lord does not take notice of us because we are insignificant. We go further and begin to assume that He must act differently than He is: that we are wiser than him and our voice is the voice of righteous indignation! And if great dangers were ordained around Jesus himself and around those who were closest to him, in the same way, He writes into the script every single trial that you and I go through. So Paul commands us: "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for

---

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, p. 424

you” [1 Thess. 5:18]. What is the will of God for us? To always give him thanks. *Always*—about what? All circumstances, Paul says.

3. But there’s a difference between grumbling and petitioning the Lord to rise and act. Eight times in the Psalms there is a cry to the Lord to “**Arise**, O LORD! Save me [3:7]...(Arise) in your anger; lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies; awake for me; you have appointed a judgment [7:6]...(Arise) O God, lift up your hand; forget not the afflicted [10:12]...(Arise) Deliver my soul from the wicked [17:13]...(Arise) defend your cause [74:22]...(Arise) judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations! [82:8]...(Arise) and have pity on Zion; it is the time to favor her; the appointed time has come [102:13]...(Arise) and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might [132:8]. Now, true, these disciples did not have the perspective of the Spirit that the Psalmist was given. But still, it’s a start. And there is a parallel to Jonah here. When the storms raged, those pagan sailors knew that something had to be done to the sinner to appease God: “Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, “What is this that you have done!” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” [1:10-11]. You might say this was superstition on their part, since they were pagans and they were used to being afraid of nature-gods. But there is more to it than that.

#### B) The Word Silences the Storm

1. He arose from his place of rest to rebuke this cosmic force of death: *And he awoke and rebuked the wind (39a)*. The disciples’ response was different than those who sailed with the prophet Jonah. Jesus was the Prophet and, unlike Jonah, He loved to speak everything that God gave him to speak. Now notice how closely the language of this action resembles the exorcisms of Jesus: He rises to the challenge, rebukes it and speaks to it, including the command to be silent. But even that is only a surface way that these waters and the demonic are similar. These are our greatest dangers and so naturally our greatest fears are aimed at what we perceive to be our greatest danger. Only the Lord himself can command our greatest dangers to flee. Even the archangel Michael sought to defeat the devil ultimately by crying, “The Lord rebuke you” [Jd. 9].

2. He *said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” (39b)*. He simply speaks to nature and it obeys without any resistance. This is the verdict that Christ the King shouts from his throne, when the accuser rages and storms against the guilt of the believer—one little word silences the devil and silences our guilty conscience.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? [Rom. 8:31-35].

Who can bring a charge against us? No one that matters. What can hurt us? Nothing that matters. For the believer, our Judge is now our Savior and our Advocate. That means that He speaks for us from in front of the bench, pleading his own righteousness and that his Father rules for us from behind the bench, having already poured out his righteous wrath upon the substitute. His sentence of “not guilty” is binding and the sentence of our real danger, hell, is silenced forever.

3. The dark waters trembled and bowed low before their Maker. And every time that you sin and then hear the gospel of Christ crucified and risen and see it and love it, every demon in hell with every record of sin against you cowers and hides from the voice of the Judge saying ‘Peace! Silent! Not Guilty!’ So, how does this end—Peace, be still—and all the disciples gave each other high fives and had a boat party? No.

### III. TERROR

#### A) They Were *Now* Filled with Fear!

1. He exposes the disciples’ weak condition gently, but fully: *He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” (40)*. Notice first of all that Jesus says, ‘Why are you—not why were you—so afraid?’ Of course someone could suppose that they are still afraid because they are so traumatized by the whole experience. But that doesn’t fit the flow of Mark’s thought at the end. Wasn’t it perfectly reasonable to be afraid of the stormy sea in and of itself? Well, not if you have God in the flesh sitting in the boat with you. But, you may say, they didn’t know that! Now notice that you have recognized a standard that we all fall short of: if we know that God is bigger than everything and that He is with us and for us, then there is nothing else worth fearing anymore. We might object that this is more easily said than done. And that is true. But all we are saying here is that *the reason* it is so hard to fear the right things and not fear the wrong things is because we do not yet see as we ought to. Jesus said, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” [Mat. 10:28].

2. *And they were filled with great fear (41a)*. What an odd reaction given such deliverance for their good! You would think that a celebration was in order: not this awkward silence. Matthew says only that they “marveled” [8:27], but Mark’s description may include marveling by going further. Luke’s says both that “they were afraid, and they marveled” [8:25]. Returning to the scene in Jonah, you will read that once the anger of God was appeased and the seas returned to normal and the sun shined on a crystal calm sea, how does it end in verse 16? “Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.”

\* Story of the truck spinning out on I-4 in 1998 \* Death > Eternal > Still > Made Vows

### B) They Could No Longer Hide Behind the Storms

1. They *said to one another, “Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?” (41b)*. We can imagine this carefully whispered between one or more of them just so that Jesus couldn’t hear them. It was occurring to them that the One who had just saved them from the windstorm was intimately connected with the One who had caused the windstorm and that causing it and ceasing it were both equally easy for him.

2. You need to understand that the sea was the most terrifying natural object to ancient people. But for this one night, something greater than the sea was there, and they were very, very afraid. In John’s Revelation we are told that when Christ returns,

everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’ [Rev. 6:15-17]

The rock of a mountain would usually present one of the more fearful things in all creation, if you were in a plane heading for its side, or even driving along one where there are loose rocks. But in reality, The Reality—held back by nothing but a helpless, weak, thinly veiling universe—rages the fire of a holy God and on that Day all who are not hidden in the boat with Christ will cry out to what used to be the biggest things to them—sky, sea, mountain, anything—‘Please, fall on us, crush us so that we don’t have to exist anymore, knowing that He sees us and is coming for us!’

### APPLICATION

**To the Skeptic** – What is fear? How do you explain it? The unperceiving unbeliever will respond: “What are you talking about—it’s a survival instinct, and that’s all it needs to be!” Oh, you mean like the instinct an athlete has to dodge a tackler or a fastball, or maybe you mean the instinct a rock has to fall to the ground or water to seek its lowest plane? “No, no, those natural things have no intent.” Oh, so you mean that it is not so much a pure instinct, but an instinct formed by intention? So it’s like the first example? “Yes, they are avoiding a kind of mild danger, but the only difference is that it doesn’t matter as much.” Oh? What makes it matter in the case of what we would call a survival instinct? “Well, survival, of course!” And now you will have to tell me why survival matters. “Ah, yes, I see where you’re going—but it’s just like the animals. They feel fear, but that fear is all about avoiding pain. They don’t sit around thinking about the meaning of life and the shortness of it.” And *you*? What bothers you about death? Is it just the physical pain that is connected to it, but which passes away as soon as we do? Is that really what we find with human fear? Then why are we so filled with fears our whole life long? Why the anxiety over making it count before that moment comes?

**To the Saint** – What role does fear have for the committed Christian? Well fear is an act of worship. What you fear and who you fear are objects that you are saying about: That thing is worthy of my being afraid of. That thing is big. That thing has a claim on who I am ultimately. But what sort of things do you say that about? Now consider the words of the hymn-writer, Katharina von Schlegel, clearly reflecting upon this episode in Mark:

Be still, my soul! Your God will undertake,  
 To guide the future as He has the past;  
 Your hope, your confidence let nothing shake;  
 All now mysterious shall be bright at last.  
 Be still, my soul! The waves and winds still know  
 His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below.<sup>3</sup>

**To the Sinner** – Have you really thought long and hard about the fact that the One who you need to be saved from is the only One who can save you? The One whom you fear is the One who alone can give you peace.

---

<sup>3</sup> Katharina von Schlegel, “Be Still My Soul,” 1752

If you are looking for a happy ending to this story today, there really is one! But it will not come the way that our sinful natures want it. C. S. Lewis once said,

In religion, as in war and everything else, comfort is the one thing you cannot get by looking for it. If you look for truth, you may get comfort in the end: if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth—only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin with and, in the end, despair.<sup>†</sup>

There is a happy ending alright, for some. Our trouble is that we want a happiness and a peace and comfort by demanding that the real world leave us all alone. But the real world that exists now, in its current state, is built by sin: the same sin that is in your heart and mine. There is no ‘happily ever after’ without rooting out the real enemy, and that will take a hard truth about the most dangerous rescue.

Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” [Jn. 14:27].

---

<sup>†</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*; *ibid.*, p. 39