

# Mark 4:35-41

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I think it would be fair to say that most of our society are becoming quite cynical! when it comes to people, public figures, public institutions who ask for our trust.

! You've got the politicians with their expenses, their duck houses and second homes, their mortgages, their affairs. They ask for our votes and then they let us down. You've got the celebrities who we thought were brilliant and then you get the scandals and the tabloids.

You get Operation Utrecht. And then there's the bankers. Perhaps we never trusted them too much, but at least we gave them our money and now we're not so sure. All these people asked for our trust, but they never lived up to our expectations. They didn't live up to our expectations and now I'd suggest that as a society we're a little wary of trusting people. We're a little wary of giving people our trust. And the disciples in the passage we're looking at today have a similar crisis of confidence. They've got a similar crisis of confidence. They've left everything they had to follow Jesus. They've given up, being fishermen mainly, to follow him. They've gone and they've followed him on his ministry.

They've seen him preach. They've seen him heal other people. But now they're in trouble themselves and he doesn't seem to care. He doesn't seem to do anything. And they panic. Can we trust him with our lives? Can we really trust this man? Will he live up to our expectations? And Jesus, as I hope we're going to see this evening, if you'll forgive the pun, completely blows their doubts out of the water. He's got no time for that. And by the end of the passage they're asking a different question altogether. And we're going to look at it today in two couplets almost. So first we're going to see in verses 35 to 38 the panic. You'll notice all of these begin with a P somehow. Verses 35 to 38 the panic. Then in verse 40 Jesus diagnoses the problem. The panic and the problem. And then on the other side we have in verse 39 the power, which gives rise to a puzzle in verse 41. The panic and the problem and then the power and the puzzle. So let's begin with the panic. Jesus by this stage is in full flow in his public ministry. He's been preaching for a while now and large crowds have been following him through the area he's preaching in. Large crowds gather to hear him preach, to bring the sick to him, to be healed. And he's been doing incredible things. And at the point we are here in Mark's Gospel, he's just come to the end of a whole day of preaching by the lake, by the Sea of Galilee. And he's worn out, understandably. It's been a busy day for him. A busy few weeks. So he asks the disciples to cast the boat off to go to the other side of the lake where he has other business to do, as we find out if we went on to chapter five. So the disciples cast the boat off and they head out into the lake. And a storm rises, doesn't it? On that day when evening had come, he said to them, let us go across to the other side. And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was, and other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so the boat was already filling.

[ 3 : 45 ] Now the Sea of Galilee isn't really a sea. So we might be thinking this isn't all that bad. But it may not be a sea, it's not a duck pond either. It's about 13 miles by 8 miles, which I'm not very spatially aware of. That's apparently about the same size as Birmingham.

So it's a big sea, it's a big lake. And if you're stuck in the middle of it in a storm, you're in trouble. And you can hear the trouble, can't you? You've got a windstorm. You've got waves breaking into the boat, so the boat was already filling. You can imagine the disciples tipping the fish out of their buckets and using them to scoop the water out of the boat.

It's a terrifying experience. It's noisy. It's panic in the boat. The wind, the wind, the waves are coming in. And the disciples don't know what to do. The disciples, they're afraid. And that's when we know this is serious. These men are fishermen. They've grown up on the Sea of Galilee, and yet they're turning to a carpenter for help. It's got to be a serious problem, hasn't it? It's got to be a serious storm. The lake they grew up on as kids, the lake where their parents taught them how to

sail, is scary. It's a serious storm. And they cry out for help in verse 38, don't they? But somehow Jesus has slept through this. Maybe he's just exhausted from the storm. Maybe he's making a point. But Jesus has slept through all the noise. He's just asleep on a cushion. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves are breaking into the boat, so the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern asleep on the cushion. And they woke him, and they said to him, Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? So we have the storm. We have the panic. And the fishermen rush to Jesus. They rush to him. They cry out for help. But they give themselves away in their words, don't they?

You can hear where their hearts are by their words. This story's in three of the Gospels. It's in Matthew and Luke as well. And in the other two Gospels, the account's slightly briefer. And they don't focus so much on the motivations of the disciples. In Matthew, the words are recorded as, Save us, Lord. We are perishing. Similarly in Luke, Master, Master, we are perishing. But there's a nuance in Mark's Gospel that's missing in these other two.

Do you not care that we are perishing? Do you not care that we're perishing? Come on, Jesus, what are you doing asleep in the boat? We're doing everything we can. Don't you care? Don't you care? There's doubt in their voices, isn't there? There's doubt. This man who they followed, who they trusted in, what's he doing now? Doesn't he care? There's accusation in the voice. They're not just doubting his ability to do anything. They're doubting his character, aren't they?

[ 6 : 32 ] They're doubting whether he cares for them. Don't you care that we're dying? Are you just going to sleep there while we die? Don't you care that we're perishing? These are shocking words. You can imagine if you were one of the first readers of Mark's Gospel, and you'd started from the beginning, and you'd seen with the disciples all the things that had happened. You get to this point, and these words are shocking. The disciples have travelled with Jesus everywhere he's gone. They've heard his preaching. And when he's taught difficult things, he's taken them aside. He's given them private tuition. They know better than anyone else what's going on at the moment. They've seen mass healings. They've seen demons cast out. They've seen one of the disciples' mother turn from being on her deathbed with fever to busily serving them tea. They've seen Jesus so filled with compassion that he would even reach out and touch a leper to heal him. With all the things they've seen, it seems remarkable that they can have these words, doesn't it? But don't you care? Don't you care,

Jesus? They're outrageous words. But what we'll see also is that this is the first time that they've been the ones in trouble. If you read through the Gospel, they've seen plenty of other people healed, but they've not been the ones in danger. They were fine when it was other people in danger. They can encourage other people, go to Jesus, he can heal you. But when it's their turn, they panic. They panic when they're afraid. Don't you care? It's outrageous, isn't it? But it's very human. And I think if we're honest, this is probably the reality of most of our Christian lives, isn't it? We know the stories in the Bible. We've read them before. We know about what Jesus has and can do. We know the theology. Perhaps we're great on our catechism. Perhaps we know the theory of what's going on. And very often we're good at believing things for other people, aren't we? We'll give people advice. You just need to trust God on this one. You need to pray about this. We'll tell other people what they need to do. We'll pray for people too. And we'll see our prayers answered. But every now and then, when it comes to our own problems, we panic, don't we? We get sick. We lose our jobs. We get lonely. We run out of money and we panic. And we cry out to God, but rather than saying save me, we say, don't you care? Haven't you forgotten me? It's a very human response, isn't it? We see our lives and we feel let down by Jesus. We wonder whether he's any better than most politicians. Don't you care? Don't you care? So there's the panic.

In the panic, they doubt Jesus. And that leads on to the problem, doesn't it? Jesus doesn't beat around the bush with this. He's very, very direct to them in verse 40, isn't he?

He said to them, why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith? Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith? Slightly surprising words. Jesus has just calmed the storm. And you'd expect there might be other things that he'd say first. Is everyone okay? He might count them. Are there still 12 of you? You can imagine there will be other things that he might say. But he doesn't beat around the bush. He gets directly to the point, have you still no faith? Jesus has a habit in the Gospels, doesn't he, of saying the unexpected.

We're expecting him to do one thing, to say something, and he says quite the opposite. And often what this does is reveals what really drives him, what really motivates him. You see, he's clearly got

the power to deal with our immediate problems, to deal with the storm.

[10:28] To deal with the healings. He's got the compassion to do it too. He's got the compassion and the power to deal with all these problems. But his real passion is to deal with the spiritual needs of these people. We see it time and time again. People come to Jesus with an immediate physical need. Think just two chapters before, we have a lame man who comes to Jesus. And rather than the first thing Jesus says being, I'll fix your leg, be healed. The first thing he says is, your sins are forgiven. Similarly here, Jesus turns things around. Yes, you have an immediate problem, the storm. Yes, that was very frightening. But the real problem I want to deal with here is your faith, is your spiritual problem. Why were you so afraid?

Do you still have no faith? Jesus has all this power, all this compassion to deal with the immediate needs. But his drive, his motivation is the gospel, which he preaches in Mark throughout. Repent and believe, the kingdom's here. That's what he wants to deal with. So although the disciples may think their problem was this storm, was this frightening windstorm, the problem Jesus wants us to focus on is their faith. Do you still not believe? That's his concern.

And I think there's two things we could notice here about what Jesus says, about the faith that Jesus is questioning about. Do you notice first that Jesus seems to be taking this extremely personally? He seems to be almost offended. Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith? There's almost a tone of indignation, of frustration. I've shown you so much. You've been with me so long and you still don't believe? He takes it personally. And I think we might struggle with that if we took a modern view of what faith is. If you read the newspapers, if you listen to what people normally say that faith is, it's a kind of alternative to science.

[12:28] It's religious thinking. It's perhaps knowing enough religious stuff. It might be a spiritual practice. Perhaps it's meditating in a certain way. Perhaps it's thinking about life in a certain way. Faith has taken on this nebulous meaning that's got so complicated it's become completely vacuous.

We don't really know what it means anymore. It's this kind of mystical, superstitious, fuzzy feeling. How can you take that personally? How can you tell someone off for not having enough of that? That sounds completely useless. Well, Jesus is talking about faith in a much simpler way here. A much more simpler, back to basics kind of way. He basically means trust, doesn't he? Do you still not trust me? Do you still not trust me? That's the problem here. They don't trust him. So the first thing is that this faith is a personal thing. It's whether they trust him, whether they know who he is and they'll trust him. The second thing is that it's not blind. People often accuse Christians, won't they, of having something they call blind faith. I'm not really sure what that is, but it's faith that goes without reason. You come into church and you've left your brain at the door and now you're sitting here doing faith a bit. You can pick your brain up on the way out. That's not what Jesus is saying here, is it? That's not what he's saying at all. Do you notice he says, have you still no faith? What does he mean by have you still? Well, he's saying you've seen all sorts of things already. You've heard me teach. You've seen me heal the sick. You've seen me have compassion.

[14:05] You've seen me cast out demons. You know who I am. He's referring them back to their experience and to what they've seen. He's referring them back to facts. You know the facts. Do you still have no faith?

This isn't a nebulous, airy-fairy concept. This is personal. And it's also not unthinking. In fact, it's quite the opposite. He's really saying, wake up, think about this. Do you not trust me? Do you not know who I am? This faith is personal and it isn't blind. But the problem is, the disciples don't trust Jesus. They don't trust Jesus that, yeah. So there's the panic and there's the problem. But do notice here, Jesus doesn't wait to fix the problem before he acts. I think I should point this out. I have taken the story out of order to make this work. He doesn't wait until they've got faith before he acts. He calms the storm before they have faith. He calms the storm in spite of their unbelief, perhaps we could say. I think it would be fair to say that sometimes we get a little confused about the cause and the effect when it comes to spiritual things.

I think sometimes we see faith as a bargaining chip. God, if I have faith, then fix this for me. Or perhaps we think of it as a kind of spiritual muscle. If I drum up enough faith in me, then God's going to go and do something for me. But we've got the cause and effect the wrong way around here. We don't have faith so God acts. God acts so that we can have faith.

God acts so that we can have faith. Jesus acts first here so that we can believe. The best example of this is the cross, isn't it? Did Jesus go to the cross because you or I had faith?

[16:06] No, none of us were born. Jesus didn't go to the cross because we had faith. He went to cross the cross well before we had faith so that we could believe. While we were still sinners, while we still didn't know him, he died for us. That's exactly what happens here as well, isn't it? While they're still doubting him, even as they're saying the words, he wakes up and he calms the storm. He deals with it before he challenges them. Perhaps you doubt with the disciples. I would imagine you do. I'd imagine we all doubt with the disciples. We all have those moments of panic, don't we? When we think perhaps Jesus doesn't care for us after all.

Well, Jesus calls us to have faith, but he's a gracious Lord. He's a gracious Lord. He's already done everything that needs to be done for us to be saved. He's not going to let us fall away or destroy us or have us die in the storm simply because our faith wasn't good enough. He's already done it for us. He's already calmed the storm. He's already died at the cross. So there's the puzzle. Sorry, I've got my peas confused. There's the panic and the problem. But we come to the power. We come to the power because if Jesus is going to ask us to trust him, we need to know who it is we're trusting, don't we? Who is this man who's demanding our faith? Who is this man that's demanding our trust? We read in verse 37, and a great windstorm arose and the waves were breaking into the boat so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, peace, be still. And the wind ceased. And there was a great calm. There's waves and there's wind.

There's noise and there's panic. And Jesus is asleep. The disciples wake him up. In all this noise, he just speaks. And there's silence. He just speaks and it all stops. He speaks and nature obeys. It's strange in this account. It's an incredible miracle, but it seems very understated. I haven't quite worked it out, but it doesn't look like 20% of the passage, does it? It's a tiny amount of the passage actually given to the miracle. It's a very understated miracle. And you think, with all this noise around him, he doesn't shout. He doesn't holler. He doesn't yell. He speaks. He just speaks.

[18:47] Jesus' power is emphasised here, isn't it, by how understated it is, how easy it is, how effortless. He wakes up from his sleep, speaks, and nature is silenced. Nature obeys. And it's interesting if you look at the words used here to describe what he says. Do you see he rebukes the wind? He rebukes the wind. He tells it off.

He's like a teacher walking into the classroom. The children are throwing around their paper aeroplanes. They're chatting. They're yelling. And the head teacher walks in. And everyone's silent. Jesus rebukes the wind. He tells it off like a teacher speaking to children. And then he speaks to the waves, doesn't he? Peace. Be still. Peace. Be still. That word be still is literally be silent. Or be muzzled. Put your muzzle on. It's like he's talking to his dog. Stop it. Stop it now. Heal. Down. Jesus speaks to the wind like a teacher talking to children. And he speaks to the waves like a master speaking to his dog. He commands nature. No one can do that. No one can do that. What's going on?

There's a parallel story to this which I think Mark wants us to pick up on. A story where something very similar happens at the beginning but the end's completely different. I don't know if you found yourself asking as you hear the story through. Who can sleep through a storm? That's what I was thinking anyway when I read it through recently. Who can sleep through a storm? Well Jonah managed it, didn't he? Jonah managed it a couple of centuries before. Jonah was asleep as he sat on his boat definitely in the wrong direction away from Nineveh. And the captain rushes down to him. What do you mean you sleeper? Sounds like the disciples, doesn't it? Don't you care? Don't you care that we're going to die? And Jonah gets up. But he can't do what Jesus did, did he? Jonah was at the mercy of the wind and the waves. Ultimately he was thrown overboard. He was at the mercy of the wind and the waves and of the Lord of heaven and earth who controls the wind and the waves. Jonah couldn't fix the storm. But as Jesus said something greater than Jonah is here, something greater than Jonah is here. The end of this story is completely different. This is no mere prophet. This is someone who can tame the sea. This is someone who can rebuke the wind. Jesus here is shown to be unique in his power and authority. There's none like him. No prophet in the Bible compares. So it seems natural that the power we see here leads on to the disciples' puzzle. The power leads automatically on to the puzzle in verse 41. And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? I don't think Mark

expects us to take this as a proper question. It's rhetorical, isn't it? The answer is obvious. There's only one person who can do this. Only one person who can command nature like this. And that's [ 22 : 19 ] God. King Canute is famous, isn't he? He's famous for foolishly thinking otherwise. Actually people unfairly told the story a little wrong. King Canute was a Danish warlord. He's the kind of person that only exists in storybooks normally. His dad was called Sven Forkbeard.

It's wonderful. He was a Danish Viking warlord who took over England in 1016. By the end of his life he was the king of England, Denmark and Norway. It sounds a bit obscure, but apparently at the time that was a big deal. King of England, Denmark and Norway. Can't say what happened to Wales and Scotland there, but anyway. And one day he decided he'd go down to the beach to prove the extent of his power. He took his throne down and he sat on the edge of the beach and he commanded the tide not to come onto his land. Stop it. He rebuked it. Peace, be still. And nothing happened. At the end of the day his trousers got shog soggy and he went home. Now the standard story is that he made a fool of himself. But according to Henry of Huntingdon, a contemporary of his, this is what he said after the event. Let all the world know that the power of kings is empty and worthless. And there is no king worthy of a name save him by whose will heaven and earth and sea obey eternal laws. There is no one worthy of the name of king save him by whose will heaven and earth and sea obey eternal laws. Even the Vikings knew it. Even the king of England, Denmark and Norway can't stop the sea. Only God can do that. Only God can do that. The Vikings knew it. The Jews knew it too. Did you notice in Psalm 65, which we read earlier, the Jews knew this fact too. Only

God can control the seas. Psalm 65 is a hymn to the God of our salvation. Verse 5, by awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness, O God of our salvation. And then verse 7, who stills the roaring seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples, so that those who dwell at the end of the earth are in awe at your signs. There's only one person who can still the sea. There's only one person who can calm the waves and tell the wind to shut up. And that's God. That's God. So the disciples must know that when they ask this question.

The disciples are well brought up Jews. They should know that only God can do this. So why do they ask him? Who is this? What is it that baffles them so much? In Matthew's gospel, the word is written slightly differently. So the question is posed, what manner of man is this? What manner of man is this that can do this? Do you notice there's a slight difference?

We know the answer to who can do this. Only God can do this. What kind of man can do this? Well, no normal man. You see, they ask the question because they've just seen Jesus asleep.

[ 25 : 30 ] He's clearly a man like other men. He gets tired. He needs to sleep. But clearly he's so much more than that. He's a man who can calm the storm. He's so much more than even the greatest of prophets could have been. He's the man that calms the storm with a word. So who is this? Who is this that the wind and the waves obey him? That's the question which they end up with at the end of the passage. Do you see they started with, don't you care? And they end up in fear, not of the storm, but of Jesus and marvelling at him. Who are you? Who is this?

Who is this that's calling us to trust in him? Who is this that's calling us to have faith? Who is this that even the wind and the rain and the waves obey him? What makes Jesus different to all those others who demand our trust? All those other people who we thought about earlier who let us down. The politicians who demand our votes and then buy duck houses for themselves. The journalists who end up phone hacking. The endless people who require our attention, demand our trust, and then let us down. Well, Jesus is the only one of them who can calm the storm with a word. He's the only one of them who is God.

I think sometimes we forget that. I think sometimes, even as Christians who come to church every week, we forget who Jesus is, don't we? It's effectively what the disciples did at the beginning. And I think we do it quite often. I think sometimes we see him as someone weak, someone unable to do what we need him to. I don't know if you've ever thought about it, but if you look at art, now I don't want to get into debate as to whether we should draw pictures of Jesus, but if you look at the paintings there are of Jesus, have you noticed that in the majority of them he's weak? He's either the baby in the manger, or the baby being held by Mary, or the wounded one being helped off the cross. He's never strong in the paintings, is he? He's always weak. But the Jesus of the Bible is very different to that. He's the one who calms the storm. He may have been a baby. He may have been the one who taught on the mountain. He may have been the one who died on the cross. But who was he when he was doing those things? He was the one who calmed the storm. The one who

was crucified and died, the one who rose again, was the one who calmed the storm. Not some weak man, not some unfortunate prophet, but God himself. The one who calls us to follow him, the one who calls us to trust him, to give everything to him, to take up our cross and to follow him, is the one who calms the storm. He's the one who the wind and the waves obey.

So perhaps when we're next worrying at home, maybe we're lying in bed afraid of the dark or whatever it is that makes us worry, and we're panicking and we think, well, do you not care? We should replace the question with this, who is this? Who is this who calls me to follow him? Who is this who commands me? It's the one who the wind and the waves obey.

One final thought. Do you notice that we often think that perhaps becoming a Christian would make these things go away completely? Becoming a Christian would make life easy. If we're following the one whom the winds and the waves obey, life will be easy. That's not the promise of this passage. Did you notice that Jesus takes them into the storm to start with? At the very beginning, on that day when evening came, he said to them, let us go across to the other side. It's Jesus who took them there. Now, I don't want to read too much into the providence here, and we should never be trying to read providence on the way. We can't really.

[ 29 : 40 ] We'll make a mess of it. But what we do see here is that Jesus may command us to do very difficult things. He may call us into the hard things. You think of the Beatitudes. The things he called us to. Blessed are the peacemakers, for there is the kingdom of God.

That's a hard call, isn't it? Or when he commands us to turn the other cheek. Or when he commands us to take up our cross and follow him. All those things are hard things. But the one who calls us to do them, the one who takes us into the storm, as it were, is the one who can calm it. He's the one whom the winds and the waves obey.

Amen. Amen.