

Mark 4:35-41

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[0 : 00] And you might have guessed that there is in part this contextual reason for turning to a passage that is not particularly intellectually stretching and is probably to all of us very familiar.

That it probably would be wise for me to say up front that the message here is not Jesus stilled the storm on Galilee and Jesus can still the storm in your heart.

Both of those statements are true. It's only the first statement that is true to this text. Because what is evidence in this text is that Jesus stilling the storm actually created a storm in the hearts of his disciples.

The passage ends not in tranquility but with Mark telling us in verse 41 that the disciples were filled with great fear.

So what Jesus did rather than cause a kind of suporific tranquility in the hearts of the disciples was to awaken them to a new sense of the majesty and the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 41] And of course this is if you went to Sunday school as a youngster ever had a well-meaning aunt who gave you a religious book then you have known the story of the stilling of the storm probably since childhood.

And it's a story that's told in each of the first three gospels. But there are certain distinctives about the way in which it's told in Mark's gospel.

You're a very well-educated congregation and you know that the early Christians believed that Mark's gospel was really Simon Peter's memoirs of the Lord Jesus.

We find this tradition very early on in the story of the post-apostolic Christian church that Mark who is called Stumpfingers because apparently his hands and his body were disproportionate to one another.

Mark who is called Stumpfingers took down the memoirs, the preaching of Simon Peter. And that's the reason why this of all the gospels is the easiest gospel to turn into the first person singular or plural.

[3 : 00] Almost everything in it, instead of it being a third person description, you can turn into a first person description and you find yourself almost immediately caught up listening to an eyewitness of these accounts.

And I think that's probably the reason in this passage there are little details that you don't find either in Matthew's gospel or in Luke's gospel. For example, in verse 36, that not only were the disciples in a boat, but there were other boats with them who were caught up in the storm.

And that we know, of course, that Jesus was asleep, but it's only Mark who tells us that there was a cushion in the boat and that Jesus was asleep in the cushion.

So there are these little details about this event that are unique to Mark. And there is an expression, a phrase, a statement I want us to focus our gaze on this afternoon that is also quite unique to Mark.

It is found in Jesus' invitation, let us go across to the other side, and then in verse 36, these words that have long fascinated me.

[4 : 23] I think because I find them so intriguing. And, leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat just as he was.

Just as he was. And taking him in the boat just as he was, they found themselves at the end of this experience, actually asking the question they hadn't been asking at the beginning of the experience.

They took him just as he was when we know who he is. You know, we've been with him these months. We've watched him. There's a kind of subtle casualness about this.

We say to people, don't we, just come as you are. You know, you know, dress up, just come as you are. People we know intimately. We don't do anything special for them.

And here, you can hear Simon Peter say, we took him just the way he was. And we had almost no idea what we were actually doing.

[5 : 37] Because at the end, we were saying to one another, we took him as he was, but we didn't really know who he was. And in many ways, that seems to me to be a kind of beautiful description of what it means to become and be a Christian.

There is no other way to take Jesus than as he is. If you don't take him as he is, you're not taking Jesus. But it's in the process of taking him as he is.

And sometimes assuming that you basically know most of the things you need to know about him. The whole of the rest of the Christian life is an ongoing discovery of who he really is.

And I want us to just follow through that process this afternoon as simply as we can together. To see what it is the Lord Jesus is doing here.

Because if I may say so, that is always the question we should be asking when we're reading the Gospels. I was brought up to ask a different question. I was brought up to ask the question, which of these disciples am I like?

[6 : 55] Or if reading the story of Nicodemus, am I like Nicodemus up the tree? And of course there is a place for that. But the real question here is, not just how are the disciples reacting, but what is Jesus doing here?

And the first and the most obvious thing I think that Jesus is doing here lies on the surface of the text. And if I can put it half humorously, it lay on the surface of the water as well.

Jesus led them into difficulty. Jesus led them into difficulty. They took him as he was, and he led them into difficulty.

Now, from their point of view, it probably felt as though they were in command of the situation. But you'll notice the way in which Mark expresses this.

In verse 35, when evening had come, he said to them, Let us go across to the other side, and therefore they took him.

[8 : 09] In other words, the plan was not the disciples' plan. It was not the plan of those, at least four disciples who were fishermen. This was the plan of Jesus.

And it appears it was part of the plan of Jesus to lead them into difficulty in the process of bringing them to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

Let us go across to the other side. And what is so striking about this is this very simple principle that as Christians we all need to grasp.

And certainly if we are not Christians, but we are drawing near to thinking about what it means to become a Christian, this is something also that we need to take account of.

That in their obedience to the Lord Jesus, the Lord Jesus led them into difficulty. Now that's not the unique teaching of this passage.

[9 : 15] Anyone who reflected on the 23rd Psalm would understand that this is part of the Lord's ways with his people. Yes, he leads us to very pleasant places.

Quiet waters, green pastures. But he also leads us into and thankfully through dark valleys.

The valley of the shadow of death is in the original Hebrew, the valley of deep darkness. So Jesus is not here doing something that his heavenly father had never done with the saints of the Old Testament.

He's doing something that actually is characteristic of what he does with all of his disciples. He leads them at times into difficulty in order to lead them through difficulty.

Which is why it's not so unusual for ministers of Christ to be asked by young Christians, Why is it that things seem to be so much more difficult for me now that I've become a Christian?

[10 : 27] And it's such an obvious principle and such a vital principle that later on when Simon Peter is writing his first letter, He then in turn says to those to whom he's writing, Dear Christian brothers and sisters, Don't be surprised at the fiery trial that's coming upon you, As though something odd were happening to you.

As though something strange were happening to you. I have a very dear friend who has an expression that he's used in speaking to me more than once, And I've always appreciated it, But there's always been a little voice at the back of my head with a question mark.

You make a decision, You sense the Lord is leading you somewhere, You follow the Lord, You make the decision, And then everything seems to fall apart. You think the Lord is leading you somewhere, You make a decision, And then it seems as though the Red Sea opens up, And everything goes smoothly.

Well clearly, In the second case, The Lord was really leading you. But what about the first case? In the second case, My friend would encourage me by saying something like, It's just like the Lord to do that.

But what this passage is teaching us is, It's also just like the Lord to do this. We can't extrapolate from our obedience to the Lord and His word.

[12:17] We can't extrapolate from that, To the thought that obedience is going to lead us into a path of ease. It may lead us, And actually when you think about it, The story of scripture is full of this kind of thing, That obedience, At times, Leads to struggle, And trial, And difficulty, And even confusion.

And as you go along in the Christian life, You encounter Christians, Who have been obedient to the Lord, And things do not seem to have worked out, The way they extrapolated from their obedience into the future.

And sometimes it takes us a little while, To come to understand, That the Lord fulfills His purposes, In our lives, Not according to our plans, Not according to our timetable, But according to His own purposes, For our lives, In order that, And this is obviously the point, Isn't it?

In order that through the difficulties, He will do something, In us, For us, And through us, That would not have been true for us, In days of ease.

So this is the first principle, That we learn. The Lord Jesus, Who leads us to green pastures, And beside quiet waters, May also lead us, Into storms.

[13:52] And of course, That's the very moment, That we, Begin to understand, We can no longer trust, In our own wisdom. We need to learn to trust, In His wisdom.

And the reason, Jesus appears to me, To lead these disciples, Into the storm, Is, Not just because, He wants to lead them, Into difficulty, And that's it.

But because, He especially, Wants to, Test, And, Try, Their faith. And this emerges, Doesn't it? In verse, 38, He's asleep there, On the cushion, And they wake him, And they say to him, Teacher, Do you not care, That we are perishing?

That's their concern, He doesn't seem to care. But you notice, What Jesus response is, The question here, Is not whether I care, The question here, Is whether you have faith.

[14:52] That's what this is really about. When you shake me, And wake me, You are saying to me, Don't you care? And, Of course, They had really lost sight of him, At that point.

He wasn't only, In the boat, Because he cared, He was in the world, Because he cared. He'd come to be the saviour, Because he cared. And so, They had lost sight, Of, Their friends, Heart of love, Towards them.

In the midst of this panic, The waves, Had been bigger to them, Than the saviour. And they'd also lost sight, Of something else.

Their master, Had said to them, Let us go over, To the other side. So, In a sense, They lost sight, Of Jesus' love for them, And they lost sight, Of Jesus' words to them.

Because this, Would be true, Again, Of Simon Peter. Their eyes, Were diverted, From who he is, To what they saw. Their eyes, Were diverted, From his interpretation, Of what was going to happen, To their interpretation, Of what was happening.

[16:10] And the interesting thing is, This question, Don't you care? I wonder if you can remember, What I think, May be the only other place, In the gospels, Where this question is asked.

This is a, This is a, Obviously, A great crisis. These men, This is a, Man crisis. But the other place, Where this question is asked, Is with, With Martha and Mary, Isn't it?

Don't, Don't you see her there, Coming out of the kitchen, Standing, In front of Jesus, Who is, Who is apparently, Seated, Towering over him, Fists clenched, Body tensed, Don't you care, My sister's not helping me?

So it could be, A fishing crisis, Or it could be, A domestic crisis, It doesn't need to be, Some big deal, It can just be, That there are guests, Coming for lunch, And, And, And what, What you are doing, Under, Under the guise, Of complaining, About somebody else, Is actually, At the end of the day, Not trusting Jesus, And of course, That was the, That was the whole situation, Wasn't it?

Mary's chosen, The better part, She's looking at me, She's listening to me, Her sister, Was actually, She was actually doing, The very two things, The disciples, In the boat, Were doing, They'd taken their eyes, Off who Jesus really is, And, They had, Stopped listening, To his word, And he, What he was doing, What he was testing, His workmanship, That's what he was doing, That's what good workmen do, Don't they?

[18 : 16] I, I, I rarely, I'm rarely allowed, To try to make anything, Because I'm a danger, Okay, But when I have, Secretly bought something, And family have been away, And thought, I'll show them, Hey, When I've got to page 16, In the kit, The last thing I'm going to do, Is test it, Why's that?

Because, I, I know, My workmanship, Is so shoddy, It's all going to fall to pieces, But a good workman, I've seen good workmen, They test, What they've done, They prove, What they've done, And the Lord Jesus, Is a good workman, And he's, He's actually testing, How much has been done, In the hearts of these, Beloved disciples, Of his, And, What he finds, That looks like, Rather to their embarrassment, Is that not very much, Has been accomplished, Why, Are you so afraid, Well, You know, I mean, I guess they were exhausted, By the experience, But maybe some of them, Are thinking, What do you mean, Why are you so afraid, Who are you right, To be afraid, And he's really saying, Not,

Not if you call me Lord, Not if you call me Savior, He's really, He's testing, His workmanship, To see, How stable, What has been, Accomplished in them, Is, In order that, They may see, How unstable, They have been, And of course, Be brought, To trust him, More fully, To trust his word, More certainly, And to trust his love, And this is how, The Lord works, Isn't it?

This is, This is what, This is what the rest of scripture, Teaches us, Tribulation, Works patience, And patience, Works endurance, And endurance, Produces character, And character, Produces hope, The Lord, Tests his work, To see, What's in us, And I think what is, Kind of interesting here, Especially if we think of this, As the memoirs, Of Simon Peter, Is, That four of these fellows, Were presumably, Master fishermen, Those of you, Have been to the sea of Galilee, It ain't a big sea, And he was a carpenter, So, It would be natural, For them to think, That they were completely, In control, Of the situation, In a sense, Even in control, Of Jesus, But you see what Jesus, Is doing, Because, Because this also, Is a pattern, Jesus, Is putting pressure,

On what they think, Is their, Strongest point, To show them, That it's, That they're strong points, That they are weak, Actually, It's a little like, What happens to the prophet Isaiah, Isn't it?

[21 : 34] What does the prophet Isaiah, Discover in the, In the holy presence, Of God, He discovers, That he's a man, Of unclean lips, I like to imagine, I'm staggering out, Of that experience, Going down to his, His friend Benjamin, White faced, And Benjamin, Sitting him down, Saying what's wrong, And Isaiah saying, I have just, Really discovered, For the first time, A man of unclean lips, If I'd been Benjamin, I know what I would have told him, Think of the number of people, In Jerusalem, Being blessed, By your preaching, You're the most, Eloquent prophet, We've had around here, For decades, If not centuries, You're, You're overstretched, Here's some money, To take a Mediterranean cruise, And, I like to imagine, Maybe this is because, Of where I was brought up, I like to imagine, Isaiah leaning over, And picking him up, By the lapels, And saying, You're not listening, To a word I'm saying,

I, Am a man of unclean lips, Now what's the point, The point is, Those lips were his greatest gift, And therefore, Of course, The easiest thing, For him to rely on, And here are these fishermen, And this is their, This is their strong suit, This is their greatest gift, It is in this area, That they know everything, And Jesus seems to know nothing, And he's testing, Their faith in him, Rather than their, Trust in themselves, And in their gifts, And in their abilities, Which would prove, Fatal to them, So why, Why does he do it, In this, I think, Kind of extreme way, Well, I think, The answer to that is, Because he means, To use these men, In a very extraordinary way,

I mean, The eleven of these men, Will stand before him, And be told, To go to the ends of the earth, With the gospel, And this is how it is, The Lord, Had led them, Into this difficulty, The Lord had done it, In order, To test, Their faith, And to, Show them, How much more, They needed to wean on him, And then of course, Ultimately, In that context, There was a third thing, He leads them, Into the difficulty, He tests their faith, And then he shows them, His glory, And this surely, Was his ultimate purpose, The way in which, The narrative ends, Is the ultimate purpose, The wind ceases, There's a great calm, He asks them, Do you still, Have no faith, And they were filled, With this great fear, This overwhelming sense of, Awe,

And they say, Not I think in unbelief, But in wonder, And awe, Who then is this, We took him, Just as he was, But what we have, Discovered here, Is just, What he really was, For even the wind, And the waves, Obey him, Because, He is of course, Not only the lord, Of their lives, He's the lord, Of their, Circumstances, Sometimes wonder, You know, About Jesus, Putting his head, On that pillow, You would love, To know, What sometimes, Went on in his mind, Wouldn't you, You know, Is he thinking, Um, How long, How long will they give me, But the other thing, I wonder about, Is actually, About Simon Peter, Um,

And sometimes, My imagination, I think about Peter, Uh, Who could be, A stubborn idiot, Having some sense, That on this sea of Galilee, He knew so well, There was likely, To be a storm, And saying, Well you lot can go, And I'm not going, And seeing, This boat, Sail into the storm, The water coming in, The clouds coming down, Uh, And standing, Watching with mixed emotions, Some percentage of him, Saying, You should have listened to me, And, As I think about him, I think, What would he have lost, By staying on the shore, And the thing he would have lost, Would have been, He wouldn't have been a witness, To the glory, Of the Lord Jesus Christ, Later on, Of course, He was an eyewitness, To the glory, Of the Lord Jesus Christ,

[26 : 44] But here, In this boat, He saw, The glory, Of the Lord Jesus, And eventually, It seems to me, In the narrative, Of the, New Testament, That left, Its imprint, On him, And I say that, For this reason, That later on, In the New Testament, In the Acts of the Apostles, Apostles, There came, A really great crisis, In Peter's life, In Acts chapter 12, He was arrested, He was in prison, Herod, Was going to bring him out, To the people, And I have little doubt, That expression means, He was going to make, A public exhibition, Of him, And if he possibly, Could man manage it, He would have Simon Peter, Executed, It's the occasion, You remember, When God sends an angel, Into the prison, Who opens the prison doors, Tells Peter to come, And Peter turns up, At the door, And they can't believe, Their prayers have been answered, But do you remember,

In what condition, Simon Peter was, That night, Presumably, Before his execution, When the angel found him, The angel did, Exactly what, Peter had done, To Jesus, But he didn't use, The same words, What the angel said was, Peter, Get up, Stop sleeping, Come with me, Here in the, Presence of this, Overwhelming, Danger, The loss of his own life, What that would mean, For the early Christian church, Apparently, Simon Peter was able, Like his master, To sleep, In the middle of the storm, Because he'd been brought, Yes, Not yet, Perfectly, But really, To understand, Who Jesus really was, To know how much, He really cared, He had died for him, And to trust his word, Implicitly, So, In many ways, This, This beautiful little story, Is really a story, Of what it means, To become a Christian, And be a Christian, The only way to take him, Is just as he is, But although you take him, Just as he is, He doesn't leave you, Just as, You are, Because he wants, To do something in you, He wants to make, Something of you, He wants to mature you, In faith, And he wants to show you, Glimpses of his glory, So that you'll recognize it, Immediately, When you see it, In its, Full, Glorious, Blaze, You read this, And you know, I think you want to cheer for Jesus, Don't you?

And to, And to, Think to yourself, There is actually, Nothing more wonderful, In all the world, Than belonging, To, The Lord Jesus Christ, Even at, Three o'clock, In a church service, On a Sunday afternoon, In Ealing, I hope you do trust him, And that together, We may be able to grow, In trusting him, Living for him, And catching glimpses of, His glorious, Grace to us, In the gospel, Let's pray together.