

FEAR OR FAITH? WORRY OR WONDER?

Mark 4:35-41

You've probably realized this already but maybe never heard it in these terms: but when it comes to living out our Christian faith and applying biblical principles to our lives, it's a lot like a rodeo. When we study a passage of Scripture and learn what it is teaching, we're typically faced with a decision to now apply it or ignore it. To do things God's way or to do things our way. And there is always something in us that wants to resist God's way. Our fallen and sinful human nature, which the Bible calls the flesh, always wants to buck against biblical principles and commands like a horse or a bull bucks against its rider.

I'll give you a few examples, many of them I picked up from the Berean Conference recently. These are all challenges for us:

- Where the Bible says character is more important than possessions, the flesh says do whatever it takes to get ahead (Prov. 28:6). It would rather live for careers and cars, not character.
- When the Bible says, "Don't merely look out for your own interests but also for the interests of others," the selfish side of us always want to make self a number one priority.
- When the Bible says repent, the flesh wants to resist.
- Where the Bible says love your enemies & pray for them, the flesh says retaliate.
- When the gospel of Mark says if you want to find life and reflect the image of God the Son, you've got to learn to deny yourself and give yourself away as servants... the flesh wants to be served.

I think you guys get the point, but today is no different. Today, we're going to look at the decisions we are faced with when we encounter the various storms in this life – when life is hard – when we have no control in the situation. How should we respond to the storms of life? In fear or faith? And in worry or wonder?

Mark 4:35-41.

"On that day, when evening came, He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in the boat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him." And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was filling up. Jesus Himself 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 got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. And He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They became very afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the seas obey Him?"

The first thing we should get a little more acquainted with is the situation. Jesus and the disciples are getting ready to cross over the Sea of Galilee at the end of a long day so it makes for a tired situation.

I. THE SLEEPY SITUATION. (VV. 35-36)

It says, "On that day, when evening came..." And that phrase doesn't seem like much at first but it is an important and integral part of the story Mark is sharing because if you remember from the last couple of sermons, Jesus has had a very busy and ministry-packed day of preaching and teaching to crowds and to the disciples (4:1; 4:10). But they're leaving the crowds and the area of Capernaum and crossing over to the other side of the lake to do more ministry. When it says they took Jesus along with them in the boat "just as He was," we can assume it means that 1) Jesus didn't always cross the Sea in the boat with them like when He walked on water. This time He rode along. And 2) He didn't get a break. At the end of the day, they didn't take time to eat properly or take a nap

or anything like that - they just left, *as He was* - with Him and the apostles probably in one boat and other followers in other boats tagging along.

And I want to ask you a question this morning in light of what Jesus keeps doing? We're learning to be "Servants like the Savior" in the gospel of Mark, right? Well, **do you ever think Jesus was tired while He was serving?** Absolutely! He was fully human like us (note: without a sin nature). He experienced thirst, hunger, anger, the loss of loved ones... and He got tired! So tired that even though the storm is raging and the boat's filling with water, He's "in the stern, asleep on a cushion."

❖ **Jesus can relate to our weariness.**

This story reminds me of the time I was on my way back from a mission trip in Chile. The flight was around 10 hours long from Santiago to Dallas/Fort Worth and there wasn't many people on the plane so I used 3 seats to lay down and sleep. I was so tired from serving on that mission trip that I fell asleep before we reached altitude and woke up to the bell saying it's time to descend. I slept through the whole flight! Jesus, in His humanity, knows what it's like to be that dog-tired.

When the Bible describes Jesus in these ways, it's reminding us that **Jesus can relate to us. There are times when we are restored by reflecting on the way God became flesh and dwelt among us and felt what we feel daily.**ⁱ Hebrews 4:15 said it best, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." We need to remember when we pray that He knows how we feel. He's been there. He knows the alarm clock feeling. He knows what it's like to lose someone you love. He knows what it's like to be taken advantage of and lied to and betrayed. And in most cases, like the cross, He's knows greater degrees of those feelings.

But while Jesus is sleeping, stormy complications start to develop.

II. THE STORMY COMPLICATION. (VV. 37-38)

Verse 37: "And there arose such a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up." So as they often do on the Sea of Galilee, the winds really pick up. There's something about the geography of this lake they say, that makes for great, unexpected storms. It's the lowest body of fresh water in the world and the valleys leading up to it with hillsides on each side, it's like a wind tunnel.ⁱⁱ

Even modern-day captains will check the weather report before heading out because this lake is not like Whalgren or Box Butte Reservoir or the Chadron Dams. It's a big lake – like Lake McConaughy big (biggest lake in Nebraska) – just as deep but twice as wide. And everyone who knows Big Mac, knows that when it starts to blow hard, boats get off the water. It gets really sketchy, real quick. Well, it's the same on the Sea of Galilee where 5-10 foot waves can start rocking the boat. And you know it's serious because these are experienced fisherman here who know this lake like the back of their hand.

It helps to picture it in your mind: You're in a little wooden boat with five to ten foot waves rocking you, while you try to bail the water out and hold on at the same time. It'd be pretty frightening. And it was because that's what Jesus puts His finger on in **the disciples' reaction: Fear**. They wake up Jesus, saying, "Don't you care that we are perishing?" They fear that they are going to perish, which is man's greatest fear by the way. And Jesus says, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" It's right here that we come to our first decision that we have to make in the storms of life. We can either react in fear or we can respond in faith.

1. Storm Choice #1 – We must choose between fear or faith.

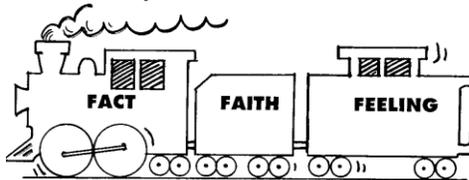
We're not just talking about thunderstorms anymore... we're talking about the storms of life – the emotional, physical, financial, or spiritual storms. We all have them. Lately, it seems like we're all going through on giant storm together, where we have virtually no control over the situation. And on top of that, some of us are facing individual storms like upcoming surgeries and treatments or job losses. And when these situations occur – situations we have no control over – we start to fear. But Jesus says, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

So I have to ask you, **are you trusting the Lord in your storm?** One of the realities that's evident through this account is that just because you're close to Jesus Christ, doesn't mean you won't experience storms in life. And we should trust the Lord in the storms because of who He is. Our view of God is like the single most important factor in determining how we live. But the disciples have either forgotten or haven't totally understood just who is in the boat with them – Jesus Christ. They're still learning who Jesus is. And if they would've had a proper view of who He is, they would realize that they have nothing to fear because they have God in the boat with them..

If Jesus Christ is in the boat with you, no storm should overwhelm us like this – not even the storm of death itself. Even the number one fear – fear of death – has been robbed of its fear for believers in Jesus Christ. We can and will call out, "Where, O death is your victory? Where O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:55) because Jesus defeated death and the grave with His resurrection. Hebrews 2:14 says, "Since the children [of God] have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."

Again though, let it sink in that **you don't have fear the storm when you have Jesus in your boat and if you're His child, we could say He's always in your boat.** He will not leave you nor forsake you and that's the greatest promise in all of Scripture, repeated from Genesis to Revelation. The Lord never leaves us or abandons us nor gives up on us. He's never there one second and gone the next – He's not unpredictable – He is predictable. He never leaves. Never changes. If you feel like God has left you in your storm, you need to remind yourself of who God is and bring your feelings into line behind who He is.

Recently I mentioned how 'blind faith' is unbiblical. Our faith, I said, is driven by facts: Facts are the locomotive and faith the car behind it. Well, there should also be another car behind faith called feelings. Our feelings need to be driven by faith in the fact of who God is because feelings can be wrong. Just because we feel a certain way, like God has left us, doesn't mean the feeling's correct.



So what we're doing when we live by fear is taking that last car, the caboose, and are making it the engine which does weird things to us. One of the things it does it that it hobbles us. Some of you probably know what hobbles are and some of you don't. Hobbles are leather belts or chains or rope that a rancher might put on the feet of a horse or a cow to limit or prevent their movement – like on a stubborn cow that doesn't want to sit still and be milked. **Fear is a lot like hobblesⁱⁱⁱ - it keeps us from stepping out and serving, from doing what God has called us to do.**

One of the fears that gets in the way is fear of the past. Some of us are probably afraid to do ministry in a certain area because of something bad that happened to us in the past and we fear it may happen again. But we can't always let the past define where God wants us to go now or to do now. Can you imagine if Paul let fear hobble him with everything he went through (see 2 Cor. 11)? Paul said this, "One thing I do: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." He had the fortitude of faith, not fear.

We've also got to learn to let go of the future fears with future details. I think sometimes we're afraid to step out into a certain ministry God is calling us to because we don't have "all the details" yet. "What am I going to say? How am I going to say it?" That's something to trust God with.

Faith and fear, guys, are diametrically opposed. When fear sets in, faith stops. But when faith sets in, fear stops. Fear either replaces faith or faith replaces fear.

*We should note, however, there is a fine line between faith and foolishness. You don't go stand out in the middle of main street to prove that you have the faith that God will protect you. That's foolishness.

But the question to ask is **how do we increase faith and decrease fear?** Well, I think we see it in the disciples and what they're focusing on. Fear increased when they were focused on the storm and their current circumstances. But where should their focus have been? On the Savior. They should have thought, "We have God in the boat with us, so what is this storm?"

❖ **Focus on the Savior, not the storm.**

For some reason, the storms always tend to steal our attention away from God. We look at the storm daily, we track the storm, we follow the storm, we count how many days we've been in the storm, we try to guess where the storm's going and when the storm's going to end... You'd think the storm has become our God since it tends to get more of attention than God does! We can even start to serve the storm more than we serve the Savior. So focus on the Savior more and the storm less.

One of things we've been doing is referring to the current storm as 2020. And I'm realizing that's not a good thing. Because if we look at it that way, we might be disappointed when it doesn't end when we want it too and if we're thinking that way, we might be tempted to think, I'll get back to serving when the storm is over. There's a lot of hope out there that the stormy season will end after election season or in 2021 that things are just going to be remarkably different again. Maybe, but maybe not. I think it's better to think of this storm not as 2020 but as a season and instead of waiting for a better season, let's serve the Savior in the season.

❖ **Serve the Savior in the season.**^{iv}

While most of the whole world lives in fear and unrest, we should be the ones who display faith in God right now and take the opportunity to serve Him in new ways.

Now let's kind of look at the last part of this account. Verse 39 says, "He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm." And I've called this last part the poised resolution because Jesus Christ has poise. He has composure.

III. THE POISED RESOLUTION. (VV. 39-41)

He remained calm. He was assured of His Heavenly Father's control and didn't succumb to the fearful distress of the disciples, who failed the test by the way.

But Jesus just performed what we and even the insurance companies would consider an “act of God”. So, in a short time in this account we go from focusing on Jesus’ **humanity** to now focusing on His **deity** – the fact that He is God. Remember, this is what Mark has been proving throughout the entire book, evident from his purpose statement from 1:1 – by writing this gospel **He is proving Jesus Christ is the Son of God, 2nd member of the Trinity and God Himself, and in this account it is evident by His authority over creation.** That sort of robust theology about who Jesus Christ is, is what the disciples are learning now and will be teaching later. Later they would say about Jesus Christ things like John 1:3, “All things came into being through Him and apart from Him nothing has come into being.” Colossians 1 says, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things and in Him all things hold together.” He is our Creator and Sustainer and Redeemer and can be trusted.

But His power to calm the storm is very comforting for us: When some storm comes into our lives that is totally out of our control, we need remember our **God has power to calm the raging storms in our life just as He can calm the raging seas.** We not only need to trust God is with us in the storm but trust He has total power over it and power to end it if He pleases. You see, the point is not that Jesus is going to come and calm all of your storms but that like Jesus, we should have faith in the storms. **Jesus doesn’t calm the storm because they passed the test but to increase their faith in Him for the next storm, so that in the next storm they will remember God is in control.**

And if He doesn’t end it as we desire, we need to remember He has greater plans in mind, which always includes the growth and maturity of His children. That’s what He often wants to accomplish in us through the trials. He’s testing us and refining us so that through them we eventually learn to reflect the image of His Son – Christlikeness. And what was His Son doing? Trustfully sleeping. **His sleep signifies more than that He is tired but that He is trusting.**

Another thing we need to remember is that He uses storms to do some of His best work in other peoples’ lives when we respond to them rightly. It’s a powerful testimony to the unbelieving fear-filled world when Christians display this kind of restful trust in God. So **rather than worrying about the storm, we should wonder how God is using it!** He doesn’t work *some* things for the sake of those who love God but *all* things (Rom. 8:28)

2. Choice #2 – We must choose between worry or wonder.

This wonder part really comes from the new fear the disciples develop in verse 41 where “they became very much afraid.” This is not the same fear they have for the storm. This fear is more of an awestruck wonder about who Jesus Christ really is based on what He has just done. It’s a wonder-fear that inspired them to say, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”... an eternal question everyone must ask. The answer is that He is God and He is in control and He is in the boat with you.

So what is your response to the storm you’re going through? Fear or faith? Worry or wonder?

ⁱ Max Lucado, *No Wonder They Call Him Savior* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 30.

ⁱⁱ Charles Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible* (Moody Press), 1232.

ⁱⁱⁱ Giles Armstrong.

^{iv} Ibid.