

A WINTER BIBLE STUDY ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Tuesday March 16, 2021: Session 5 - Readings

Galilee: "Jesus Stills a Storm" Mark 4:35-5:43

A Multitude at the Seaside

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

1. Peek at the Greek: *epitemesen* (ἐπιτίμη) & *pephimoso* (φειμώω)

The account of Jesus calming the storm is one of his most famous miracles in all of the gospels. However, some of the terminology Mark uses to describe the scene parallels a previous miracle. Mark 4:39 says that Jesus "rebuked" (*epitemesen*) the wind and commanded the sea to "be still" (*pephimoso*). The exact same terms appear back in Mark 1:25 when Jesus heals the man possessed by a demonic spirit, which may imply some sort of evil presence magnifying the terror of the storm described here.

Mark frames the calming of the storm like an exorcism. Jesus speaks to the elements and they listen. The term translated "be still" can also literally read, "be muzzled" (1 Cor. 9:9; 1 Tim. 5:18), as though the weather were a disobedient animal forced to submit to the command of its owner.

Jesus Heals the Gerasene Demoniac

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea. The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, ~~clothed and in his right mind~~, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. ~~Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it.~~ Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood.

2. Background: Of pigs and demons

Mark 5:1–20 includes one of the more bizarre parts of the story. What's the deal with the pigs? Other than the pigs, Jesus destroys something with his power only one other time (Mark 11:12–14, 20–21). So, what do we make of it?

Due to ritual cleanness laws, Jews didn't raise pigs as livestock. But Gentiles did. Herds like the one in Mark 5:1–20 were a source

2. Background: Of pigs and demons (Continued)

of income. Jesus doesn't actually command the demons to inhabit or kill the pigs, but he does give them permission. The dramatic end to the demons' power displays Jesus's ability to totally dominate demonic activity. Previously, the possessed man lived in a cemetery, broke every form of restraint placed on him, and walked around naked, cutting himself with stones and screaming at nearby residents. At the command of Jesus, all of that changed. The demons departed, and he sat down calmly before Jesus.

Yet how do the people from the city respond? *"They began to beg Jesus to depart from the region"* (5:17). Jesus had freed a man from a legion of demons. But the townsfolk cared only that the freedom had cost them their livestock. Rather than praise Jesus for what he had done, they were terrified by his power and cared more for their pigs than they did for this man now free from demonic oppression. Most of us aren't pig farmers. Following Jesus probably won't mean a complete collapse of our agricultural enterprise. But following Jesus does come with a cost. Sometimes the salvation he offers means depending wholly on him, instead of on what we've come to trust for safety—financial or otherwise.

Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. But Jesus refused, and said to him, *"Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you."* And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.

A Girl Restored to Life and a Woman Healed

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, *"My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may*

be made well, and live." So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him.

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, *"If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well."* Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, *"Who touched my clothes?"* And his disciples said to him, *"You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'"* He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, *"Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."*

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, *"Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?"* But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, *"Do not fear, only believe."* He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, *"Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping."* And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, *"Talitha cum,"* which means, *"Little girl, get up!"* And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

BACKGROUND ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Gospel of Mark – From Fear to Faith (4:35-5:43)

<https://mattدابbs.com/2008/02/28/gospel-of-mark-from-fear-to-faith-435-543/>

The NIV chapter break between 4 and 5 is in an unfortunate place. 4:1-34 is a distinct unit and 4:35-41 clearly fits together better with the miracles in chapter 5. There is a common theme in the four miracles in these verses. In each one people are afraid and each time Jesus points to the importance of moving from fear to faith.

Jesus Calms the Storm (Mark 4:35-41):

What's the big deal...Jesus calms one storm on one sea to save one boat full of people. Out of all the storms, seas, and people who have needed saved why is this one such a big deal? Ben Witherington (Mark, 174) points out the first big picture item that is happening in this series of stories. What three forces in the ancient world can you name that would be outside your control? Nature? Powers? Death?

In these stories Jesus confronts these head on, commands them into submission, and wins. Notice what Jesus says to the storm, "Quiet! Be still!" He commands it. He speaks to it. He is re-creating and subduing nature. In the very beginning God separated the waters above from the waters below (Gen 1:7). In Mark 1:27 Jesus rebuked an evil spirit and it obeyed. In the next story Jesus rebukes a legion of demons and they obey. Jesus is not just calming one storm. He is demonstrating a far greater power through this one representative act. The kingdom of God is breaking in and people are going to need new wineskins in order to accept this new wine because what happens next is even more inconceivable. But first notice the reaction of the disciples – they were afraid and Jesus calls them to faith.

Jesus Triumphs in Gentile territory (Mark 5:1-20):

In 4:35 Jesus said, "Let us go over to the other side." Other side of what? The Sea of Galilee. What was on the "other side?" Gentile country. We tend to read the Gospels very flat with one miracle being just as astounding as the next but that is not how they would have heard this. Jesus is crossing into enemy territory. On the way in they go

through a storm, which he stills. When they get there they dock the boat at a cemetery, next to a field of pigs, and a bleeding man filled with not just one demon (like in Galilee) but a legion of 2000 demons. In the words of Three Dog Night, this is the place "mama told me not to come." Just like with the storm, Jesus commands the demons out of the man and they obey.

From this point on we get a back and forth parallel between Jesus ministry in Galilee and his ministry in Gentile country across the Sea of Galilee. Each time they enter Gentile country they encounter a storm (BWIII, 174). The order of Jesus' miracles in Gentile/pagan country mirrors the ministry he did in Galilee (Jewish country). Ever wonder why Jesus fed 5000 and 4000? It was not 9000 Jews he fed. It was 5000 Jews the first time and 4000 Gentiles the second. What was Jesus very first miracle in Mark? He exorcised a demon in the synagogue in Galilee (Mark 1:21-28). After that crowds of sick Jews were put before Jesus for him to heal. What was the first miracle Jesus did on Gentile soil? He exorcised a demon (Mark 5:1-20). After that crowds of sick Gentiles were put before Jesus for him to heal. By the way, I give Witherington credit for bringing most of this to my attention.

But here is what the commentators miss. The disciples on the sea were afraid and Jesus pointed to faith. The crowds that came to see the healed many named "formerly possessed by Legion" were afraid and Jesus didn't point to faith. How could he? They didn't have the Torah, prophets, etc. What did Jesus do? He told him, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you." N.T. Wright points out that this man was the first apostle to the Gentiles rather than Paul (Mark for Everyone, 57). Instead of pointing them toward faith, he pointed this freed man to teach them about the Lord and his mercy to build their faith. The two stories that follow also deal with faith.

Jairus' daughter and a Sick Woman (5:21-43):

Jairus comes to Jesus with a bold statement of faith, "He pleaded earnestly with him, 'My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.' So Jesus went with him." (5:23-24). By the way verse 24 makes a great memory verse! Mark departs that story for a moment in one of his classic "Markan

sandwiches”. He tells the story of the woman who had been bleeding 12 years who in faith touched Jesus clothes to be healed. Notice what happens next. Jesus asks who touched him. The woman comes forward, “trembling with fear, told the whole truth.” Notice Jesus’ response, “Daughter, your faith has healed you.” (5:34). Fear – faith, fear – faith, fear – faith. We see it again in the completion of Jairus’ story. People came and said his daughter had died. At this Jesus said, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.” (5:36). Jesus goes to his house, enters her room, and commands her to “get up.” Even though in the grave, her spirit obeys and she is raised from the dead.

Jesus’ words ring loud and true – Don’t be afraid. Just believe. Are you facing a storm? Why lack faith? Why be terrified if Jesus is in the boat. The message of these four stories is this – Jesus has the power to control what to us is uncontrollable. Because of that we need to put away our fears and believe.

The Mystery Calms

(Source: **Mark**; Interpretation Bible Studies: Richard I. Deibert. Pp. 44-45)

Jesus sails from his stormy lecture on discipleship (4:1-34) straight into another storm, and one of the Church’s most beloved stories. We have even adopted this story as a symbol for the Church: a ship with a Cross for a mast, heaving through the gale of life.

Mark makes it clear that this is not just another afternoon squall on the Sea of Galilee, but a whirlwind from hell which might drown the Church in a watery abyss. Mark paints this scene, captured so powerfully by Rembrandt van Rijn in his painting “The Storm on the Sea of Galilee,” to typify the mighty challenges confronting Christian community throughout the centuries. So far in Mark’s narrative, the disciples have heard their calling. Now they must know the gates of hell cannot prevail against them.

We are about to examine the nature of Jesus’ power. For the next fifty verses, we will walk with the Son of God straight into the eye of the four storms within human existence. Thus far, we have encountered many miraculous deeds, including the expulsion of a convulsing Spirit (1:21-28), the healing of leprosy (1:40-45), the curing of paralysis (2:1-12), and the restoration of a congenitally malformed hand (3:1-6). Up to this point, however, Jesus’ deeds have only piques our curiosity about his

identity. Until now the mighty deeds have been sideshows along the way to Jesus’ person.

Now, beginning with a storm on the sea, Mark moves Jesus’ miraculous power from side to centre stage. No longer interested in indirectly prodding our curiosity about Jesus, Mark wishes to dazzle the Church with Jesus’ sheer might – to leave us breathless, awed, and without excuse in the courage of our discipleship.

With these stories, Mark converges the power of Jesus with his baptismal identity as God’s beloved Son. No longer the means to other Revelation, Jesus’ acts in chapter 4 become *ends* in and of themselves, *the* revelation. In this breathtaking narrative, *who Jesus is* can only be fully grasped in *what Jesus does*. When this narrative is complete, the miracle-working power of Jesus will stand apart from the everyday magic of all other powerful persons in the ancient world.

We set sail into Jesus’ person on the Sea of Galilee as the powers of the abyss pound over the gunwale of our boat. We make it to the eastern shore, to the eerie country of the Gerasenes, where a soul fouled by evil lunges at our faith. We are forced back to the western shore, where a street woman stalks us. Finally, the death of a twelve-year-old child threatens to steal the last breath of our discipleship. Miraculously, we survive. And Jesus is made known to us as Lord over chaos, the living embodiment of Sabbath calm.

Mark juxtaposes these mighty deeds to give them cumulative impact. He tumbles them together in the Church’s imagination as an incomparable witness that creation harbours no chaos strong enough to overcome the reordering power of the Creator. As it was in the beginning, it is now for the Church: the formlessness and void of our lives, the watery madness and demonic estrangement, are, to God, the clay of creation.

In these incidents, Mark highlights the fragility of life and provokes us to ponder the vicissitudes of human existence – accidents of nature, personified evil, mental illness, chronic bodily dysfunction, societal ostracism, premature death, the loss of a future. Mark forces the question: are you convinced yet, that neither death, nor life, not angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything other chaos threatening creation can separate you from God? or have you still no faith?