

## Who is this?

Ballina Baptist, October 4, 2020

Mark 4:35-41

### Introduction

In this much loved passage we read of Jesus calming a great storm but creating an even bigger one! The word *mega* – meaning ‘great’ – occurs three times in this passage. There is the *mega storm* (v 37), the *mega calm* (v 39) and then, the *mega fear* (v 41). It points forward to the ultimate storm of final judgment, its calming and the fear that follows.

Let's have a look at this passage.

**35 *That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side."*** It was Jesus who decided to go across the lake.

**36 *Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.*** The disciples did as he asked and they set off with other boats accompanying them.

**37 *A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.*** A mega storm endangered the boat and everyone in it.

**38 *Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"***<sup>1</sup> In the midst of all this commotion Jesus was asleep on a cushion in the stern of the boat. In fear the disciples woke him accusing him of not caring if they perished. What did they expect him to do?

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<sup>1</sup> Given the parallel with the question of the demons could it be that the word 'perish' points beyond physical death to eternal death?

**39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.** In response to Jesus' rebuke there was a mega calm – a glassy sea.

**40 He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"** Was this a reasonable question? Wouldn't you be afraid? In what way did they have no faith?

**41 They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"** Here is the final mega. In response to Jesus calming the storm they 'feared with mega fear'. They were more fearful now than when the storm was raging and they asked, **"Who is this?"**

Well! Who is this?

The disciples had seen Jesus heal the sick, cleanse a leper, drive out demons and even forgive sins. They had heard his teaching about the hidden nature of the kingdom of God. And now, they've seen him instantly still a storm. Should they be still asking the question (who is this?) or drawing an obvious conclusion? Perhaps they had drawn the right conclusion and that is why they were 'fearing with mega fear'. Were they beginning to perceive that he was not just an exhausted man asleep on a pillow but the Son of God, the sovereign Lord of the universe? When human beings stand in the presence of God they typically tremble in fear (e.g. Isaiah 6).<sup>2</sup>

How often are we, like the disciples, slow to comprehend who Jesus is and what he is doing in our own lives?

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<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the LORD esteems those who tremble before him (e.g. Psalm 2:11; 96:9; Isaiah 66:2, 5; Phil. 2:12).

Let's work through this passage again

We now see that **Jesus, the sovereign Lord of the universe, planned this trip across the lake.** He knew that they would be confronted with a storm. He knew that he would sleep through the mega storm. He knew that the disciples would wake him in fear for their lives. Why would Jesus do this? What was his purpose?

Does Jesus do similar things in our lives? **Do you think about the circumstances in your life – storms or no storms – as under the sovereign control of Jesus?** What difference does this make? If I know that Jesus is the sovereign over all the universe what difference does that make to my response to both the storm and the calm?

We should not overlook the role of the disciples in this event. **They 'obeyed' Jesus and crossed the lake.** The fishermen among them knew that severe storms could arise on lake Galilee very quickly late in the day. This mega storm which threatened to kill them was, in one sense, a result of their obedience to Jesus. This is such an important Bible truth. **Obedience to God does not guarantee a storm-free life. Indeed, it almost assures that storms will come** (cf. Matt. 5:10-11; Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 3:12).

The disciples may have thought to themselves: "Who is this man who sleeps so soundly through the storm?" Jesus sleeping on a cushion not only points to his *true humanity* – likely exhausted by his preaching and healing ministry – but also to his *true divinity*. Unlike the disciples who feared for their lives,

the sovereign of the universe who controlled the storm, slept soundly. **Jesus' divinity is seen not only in his calming of the storm but also in his personal calm throughout the storm.**

**Perhaps one of the purposes that Jesus had in this event was to teach his disciples not only about who he truly was but also who they truly are.** Like us, they were limited in their response to a storm beyond their control. They – like us – were quickly reminded of their own finitude and weakness. Jesus was their only hope, and so they woke him in fear of their lives.

What did they realistically expect him to do? Did they want him to comfort them as they faced certain death? Perhaps they were indignant that he calmly slept while they cowered in fear. They certainly didn't expect the storm to instantly stop at Jesus' rebuke. But Jesus was their final hope. Is he yours?

This reminds me of Psalm 44:23 where we read: ***Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever, or Psalm 35:23: Awake, and rise to my defence! Contend for me, my God and Lord.***<sup>3</sup> How many times has this been your experience? The troubles of life can be so confronting that it feels like God is asleep.<sup>4</sup> **Does God use the storms he allows to buffet us to forge our dependence upon Him alone, and to grow a desperation in us that makes us cry out to God in prayer? “Awake, O Lord!”**

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<sup>3</sup> Contra Psalm 121:3-4 ***He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.***

<sup>4</sup> It also reflects Jesus' own teaching concerning prayer in Luke 11:5-10 where Jesus likens prayer to a man waking his neighbour from sleep at midnight in order to meet his need for bread.

In Psalm 107 we read of hardened sailors in their ship at sea. ***The LORD... spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. 26 They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. 27 They reeled and staggered like drunken men; they were at their wits' end. 28 Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. 29 He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. 30 They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven. 31 Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love...***

**Is the Lord stirring a fear in your life? Fear is a good thing if it causes us to call out to God for help.** I came to know Jesus because of the storm of the fear of punishment in hell for my sins. I came to him desperate because I could not save myself. In deperation I cried out to God. I said, "I'm not even sure if you're real but if you are please help me". And he did. He gave me faith to believe that his Son died for my sin and was raised from the dead to declare me not guilty (Rom. 4:25).

***At their wit's end*** (Ps. 107:27) the disciples woke Jesus up. They had no expectation that he would still the storm, they simply had nowhere else to turn. **First, Jesus spoke to the storm. At his rebuke the mega storm gave way to a mega calm** – not a whisper of a wind, not a ripple on the water! In a moment, changed from a frightening raging storm to tranquil yet deafening silence. **Then, Jesus spoke to his disciples and mega calm was swallowed up with mega fear.**

**40 He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you**

***still have no faith?"*** Let me begin with the last question first. **In what sense did the disciples have no faith?** Was it that they lacked the faith to rebuke the storm themselves? I don't think so. Was it that they didn't believe that Jesus had the power to calm the storm? Probably. But primarily, I think that their lack of faith had to do with what they said to Jesus, ***"Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"*** It was not primarily a lack of faith in his power but in Jesus' character. They doubted if he truly cared for them. They had seen him tirelessly heal the sick and drive out demons, respond with compassion to the leper asking for healing and grant forgiveness to the paralytic. How could they possibly accuse him of not caring?

This is an important question for each of us. **Do we ever doubt Jesus' character of care and compassion toward us?** When life is particularly difficult do we question God's goodness? When the prophet Jeremiah surveyed the utter destruction of Jerusalem and the death that resulted he said, ***"Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness"*** (Lam. 3:22-23).

Now Jesus' final question ***to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid?"*** (40) Is Jesus asking them about their fear of the storm or their fear of the calm? Or more accurately, about their fear of the One who brought about the calm? 41 ***They*** (literally) ***'feared with mega fear' and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"*** Their great fear concerned the identity of Jesus. "Who is this?" is a

question of abject fear! The storm was terrifying but the person who rebuked the storm is even more frightening! Jesus' words in Matthew 10:28 support this conclusion. ***“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”*** The reality is that if Jesus is not caring and compassionate, as they accused him, then he truly is to be feared. If God is not merciful then we are in great trouble. Thank God that his mercies *are* new every morning (Cf. 2 Sam. 24:14).

Who is this man? Jesus' identity hinges not only on his power but also on his character of care and compassion. One final Psalm: 130:3 ***If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? Could anyone here? 4 But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.*** If we must face God's judgment for our sins we should be terrorized by fear. However, if God forgives those who confess their sins and trust in the Saviour Jesus we have an even greater reason to fear. Not a fear of terror but a fear of awe at his mercy. **We stand breathless before the God who could quite rightly and justly bring us to judgment but in his mercy he forgives and restores.**

In the storms that buffet our lives we are encouraged to wake our Saviour up when he appears to be sleeping. Remember, he not only ordains the storms but he is also the *only* one who has the power and compassion to still the storm. He has good purposes in the troubles and hardships that we face in life. In particular, that we learn total dependence on the Lord and cry

out to him for help. We trust him to act on our behalf because he *is* caring and compassionate toward those who fear him (cf. Ps. 103:13).

Jesus alone can calm the storms in our lives while at the same time stirring an even greater storm in us concerning his true identity. We who trust in Christ not only know his mega calm in the forgiveness of our sins and eternal fellowship with God the Father, but also the mega fear of grasping how a holy and righteous God can have mercy on wretched sinners like us.

Fear is often an ambiguous experience that both frightens us and and yet draws us. We are attracted to the power and beauty of storms and yet terrified at the destruction they can bring. When the disciples asked, “Who is this?” It was not just an intellectual question. It was a question of awe – “Who is this?” It is a question that touches our inmost being. It stirs the heart and troubles the soul, and yet enthralls our whole being – “Who is this?” **This is the only man who can save us from the final storm of eternal judgment. He did not rebuke the storm of God’s wrath against our sin but bore the full force of God’s judgment on our sins in himself on the cross.** Know that Jesus does care about you, and tremble in reverent fear before him who bore your punishment. On that final judgment day those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life will indeed tremble in gobsmailed fear and praise of his sheer mercy on sinners.