

Dear fellow believers,

I recently came across a challenge and two questions recently. The challenge was from Kenneth Boa's book (Conformed to His Image, which I'm convinced is one of the best books ever written): "Write your obituary now and see if it will play well in heaven." The first question is also from that book: "What are you taking under your arm to the ultimate show and tell?" I'm not sure where the second question is from but it's thought-provoking: "How is it that knowing what we do about Christ's power, realizing that He is with us right now, assured of His ultimate victory in all things, we are still afraid?"

All the headlines recently have been on coronavirus (COVID-19). There is much fear and worry; panic is the response of many. Storms, they come, don't they? Being a Christian does not exempt us from these powerful circumstances that sometimes hit when we least expect them, especially when we're being obedient! Some of these storms cause us to be fearful, not trusting. What is it for you? What makes you timid, cowardly, forgetting all the lessons you've heard? What storm in our lives brings out our lack of faith, our lack of not taking God at His Word and acting on it?

It could be the unknown, the unexpected, the uncontrollable; possibly it's failure, or 'maintaining our success', worried about keeping up the pace you've set for yourself; sometimes it's fear of change or loss or of rejection, of growth, of commitments, of close relationships; it may be fear of the future or of dying or death. When do you cry out, "God, everything is going wrong! Don't You care!?" I find this most often takes place in my life when I can't plan the situation ahead of time or when things don't go as I had planned. When I went through some unsolicited criticism, I tended to panic because I didn't know what to 'do', how to 'plan' for it, how to 'prepare' so it wouldn't take place again. What will cause us to be people of faith? What can and should we learn from the storms of life?

I came across several passages that were very helpful to me as I went through the time of disapproval. One of those was in **Mk. 4:35-41**. If you'd take the time to **read** those verses, maybe we can learn together from Jesus' actions and words how to be people of faith in the midst of the storms of life.

As we approach the passage under consideration, the followers of Jesus had seen Him perform many miracles and also heard Him teach many truths. Even the day of this passage, Jesus had given and then explained to His disciples several parables. He was giving them truth to base their faith on. This is another parable, only one in action, not in word. They had just heard fresh truth; now comes a storm to see what they've learned. Maybe we should learn that storms are often testing grounds for truth heard. Maybe we should learn that storms come, and often God has prepared us ahead of time for them.

Let's look at **:35-36. :35 On that day, when evening came, He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side." :36 Leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in the boat, just as He was; and other boats were**

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**with Him.** That day had been long and exhausting for Jesus. If we put the whole day together it seems that Jesus had been in a house, dealing with His misunderstanding family and with vindictive scribes; then by the sea, sharing parables with a sensation-seeking crowd and teaching His followers who wanted to understand and grow. So, when evening came and it was getting dark, Jesus was drained; it had been a tough, fatiguing day, like ones we often have. The kids are rambunctious, the neighbors upsetting, the family interfering, the job bewildering, the boss confusing, someone needed direction. These things add up and sometimes we just fall into bed & collapse.

When evening came for Jesus, He said to His disciples, "Let's head for the other side of the Sea of Galilee." And in a large fishing boat, they headed out. Other smaller rowboats were following (they too would be recipients of God's power and mercy). Now the area of boating and fishing was an area several of the disciples excelled in; they were fishermen; they knew what they were doing! Notice, they took Him. And also notice, they were being 100% obedient. It was Jesus' idea to go to the other side. Often God chooses to use the areas in which we've been trained to accomplish His purposes, we are being as obedient as we know how to be, we're doing exactly what the Lord intends—when the storm strikes!

We read more in :37-39. **:37 And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. :38 Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep (was sleeping) on the cushion [perhaps a sailor's rowing cushion]; and they woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" :39 And He got up and rebuked (ordered) the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm.** While crossing, at night, a fierce gale of wind came up, the waves were breaking over the boat, the boat was filling fast (or sinking fast)! The Greek words used are descriptive of a violent storm or even a hurricane. Breaking forth from black thunder-clouds in furious gusts, with sheets of rain. **Mt. 8:23-27** describes it as a violent upheaval like an earthquake, a great shaking. The waves were throwing themselves into the boat, and repeatedly doing so. Around the Sea of Galilee, which is 680 feet below sea level, hot air draws storms down with sudden power from the surrounding mountains. This was definitely a real threat to their lives! You can see the disciples bailing like crazy! Haven't we felt some of life's experiences are threats to our lives too? Perhaps the coronavirus feels like that to you. What does one do in a situation like that?!

Where's Jesus? He's asleep, on a cushion, in the back of the ship. Remember His exhausting day: The demanding crowds, the religious leaders' opposition, His family's misunderstanding, His disciples desiring to grow. He was so tired at the end of this day that the need of His body for rest overcame any outward sensations. His need for sleep shows His true and real humanity, for He had evidently toiled up to and almost beyond the limit of His strength. He needed the rest. He was truly human.

These experienced fishermen were scared, stiff, and so they woke Jesus.

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**"Teacher, don't You care that we are perishing?"** It appeared to the disciples that Jesus was indifferent to their need. **Mt. 8:25** says, "The disciples went and woke Him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!' Obviously this is not an act of faith because Jesus soon exposes that they exercised no faith. These men expected to die. Because they were going in obedience, it made the storm that much harder to understand.

Perhaps we should learn that obedience brings no immunity from troubling circumstances. This was the end of everything: "Teacher, don't You care!" God doesn't appear to care, and we were being so obedient! Notice, it's the disciples' idea that they're perishing, not the Lord's! Where's the day's learning? Gone, forgotten in the presence of the storm. They who had been given so much didn't use it now. I get criticism or hear I didn't please somebody, and I tend to panic, bail like crazy, don't use what I've learned, and incriminate God, questioning, "God, don't You care? I'm perishing!"

In **:39** Jesus arose, rebuked the wind, and said to the water, "Hush, be still. Be muzzled and stay that way; be being calmed." Here we learn that Jesus' Father-given authority extends even to nature (and soon to demon-possession, incurable illnesses, and even death). The better we get to know Him, the bigger He gets. We serve a mighty Lord; may we never forget it! And what had been a threat to their very lives was suddenly strangely quiet. The sea was almost immediately beaten back into levelness; the waves, as though some giant hand pressed them down; the wind, roaring and battering, suddenly ceased. A great calm occurred; there was absolute stillness. "A solemn silence." Can't you picture these men standing there, dripping wet, bailing buckets in hand, standing in a calm boat on a calm sea! Isn't that some scene?

Then He addressed His disciples in **:40**, **"Why are you so afraid (cowardly fear, hesitant)? How is it that you have no faith?"** "Evidently He was justified in sleeping, and they should have known not to awaken Him, or else there is no meaning in His rebuke." "Why are you so timid, cowardly; where is your faith?" Jesus never reprovved for questions or mistakes, but He did for lack of faith when it could and should have been present. He didn't rebuke them for their words, "Don't You care...?" He did care; He proved it by His actions. These disciples hadn't learned from Jesus throughout the day. When we study the Word or hear the Word explained, what do we do with the information, use it or lose it? Since Biblical faith rests on Biblical facts, the disciples had a basis from the teaching throughout the day on which to exercise Biblical faith when they encountered the storm. Jesus was justified in saying these words of rebuke because the disciples had Biblical facts on which to base their faith. But they chose not to believe and act on those facts. Instead the accusation, "Lord, don't You care!" They shouldn't have been afraid but they were; why? No faith! Faith is the answer to fear.

What was Jesus teaching them and us? Faith in Him is the only answer to fear of circumstances because He has the Father-given authority to do whatever is best. Faith in Jesus is the only antidote to fear in all its grotesque shapes and forms. Apparently if He's asleep (or we feel He is!) and a storm

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I've often wondered how the Twelve would have reacted if they HAD had faith. Jesus had said, "Let's go over to the other side." If necessary, storms come during our journey (**1 Pet. 1:6-8**). We need to understand that no storm can wreck the program of God.

After the calming and His words, then the disciples in :41 were really afraid: they feared a great fear. **They became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"** This was not the cowardice of the storm but dread, terror, seized with alarm, caused not by the storm but by the man! "Who is this man?" **Mt. 8:27**, "What kind of person is this?" We must find out. He's greater than we thought."

He had been an exhausted man asleep; then a man so tremendous in power that the wind and sea obeyed Him. The rush of the wind and the beating of the waves didn't awaken Him, but the cry of men in trouble did. It's like a mother who can sleep with a train passing by but awakens at her baby's first whimper. Is Jesus our friend, our leader, our teacher? Yes! Yet greater than that! Who is this? In the answer to that question is the secret of rest. This passage makes clear that if Jesus is present, all is well, even if a storm is raging, even if He appears to be asleep, even if He appears not to care.

In Jesus' words we see that He was actually laying the groundwork for the next storm because two chapters later they face another one. There will always be storms; how will we respond? If we would see the greatest things, we had better not panic. As we are so like the Twelve, Jesus' response to them is good for us to ponder. Jesus is saying, "Follow Me. All such panic is unnecessary for you, and unworthy to Me. Let Me take you through the storm. Be a person of faith. Learn when you can so you'll not panic in the storm. It's not the miracles that will make you believe or convince you; it's the Word that I speak that you can base your faith on." As with all storms, this incident ends with our focus on the Person of Jesus.

A couple of other matters stick out here too: (1) the rowboats: Jesus' act of mercy was on a wider scale than just the Twelve. (2) even when fear came, Jesus didn't let them utterly collapse; He responded even though they had no faith! What a caring Lord we have!

What can we learn from these verses? First, not to put demands on God that He take out all the storms of life; they seem to be necessary, both to reveal us and to grow us. Second, it would be great if God would hush the storms we're in at the moment, but apparently there are greater things, such as watching Him through the storm! Third, we can expect the Lord to make a storm a laboratory in our lives to see how well we have understood His Word planted. Has the seed of the Word of God taken root sufficiently in us to give us the assurance that there is no one or thing which can separate us from His care and love? If so, we can live in a world like ours confidently, faithfully,

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and not afraid. Fourth, we can learn that obedience doesn't promise freedom from fear if we aren't basing our faith upon His words.

What should be appropriate responses for us when we encounter storms? How about, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief. I don't know what to 'do' but I trust that You are using even this storm for my best, as part of Your growth process for me, and out of Your love. Although I don't understand it, I do know You well enough to thank You for putting me in this situation where I don't have control. I realize my panic is unnecessary for me, and unworthy to You. I trust You."

When going through those months of disapproval, I finally got my eyes fixed on the Lord alone, and there (in Him) I found rest, peace, patience, love, joy—even though the disapproval went on for quite some time. I found in our Lord enough, more than enough!

Christian brothers and sisters, you're very special to me. Thanks for letting me address you in this way. It's probably for my benefit that I'm writing this because of some uncontrollable (by me) storms in my own life, but I thank you for listening and praying. My prayer for all of us is that Jesus won't have to say to us, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" By this time, with the understanding of the Word that we have, we should be known as a body of TRUSTING believers, even in the midst of a storm!

Let's close with another quote: "Has the seed of the Word of God and His kingdom taken root sufficiently in us to give us the assurance that there is no one or no thing which can separate us from His care?...that nothing can hurt or destroy us ultimately? If so, we can live in a world like ours confidently and unafraid."

In our caring Lord's Name, Joel

#### EXTRA INTRODUCTORY NOTES TO THIS PASSAGE:

This gospel was written by a man named Mark. He probably got most of his information from Peter the apostle. Mark went on the first missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas, but left for undisclosed reasons. Later when he wanted to go on the second missionary journey with them, Paul refused to take him. It caused a split between Paul and Barnabas; they each went their separate ways, Paul taking Silas, Barnabas taking Mark. However, at least ten years later, Paul speaks highly of Mark, saying he is useful for service. It proves that one failure in life does not mean the end of usefulness. Mark wrote this primarily for Gentile readers; he presents Jesus as always in motion, serving. As you read through this gospel, it's like a video of Jesus in action, moving towards the cross. His main thrust is to present Jesus as a servant and as a ransom; the key verse would be **Mk. 10:45**, "For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." He probably wrote this gospel in the late 40s or early 50s A.D.

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