

# Mark 4:35-41 - How to sleep in the storm

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Preacher: Steve Palframan

[ 0 : 00 ] And we are reading from the book of Mark, chapter 4, verses 35 down to 41. Jesus calms the storm.

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, let us go over to the other side. Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along just as he was in the boat.

There were also other boats with him. A furious squaw came up and the waves broke over the boat, so it was nearly swamped. 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? He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, quiet, be still.

Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith? They were terrified and asked each other, who is this?

[ 1 : 04 ] Even the wind and the waves obey him. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks so much, Deborah. Do keep that Bible passage open in front of you.

We're going to be working our way through it. This is the last one in our series in Mark's gospel for a little while. Let me pray now. Ask for the Lord's help as we look at his word. Father, we know ourselves well enough to know that we are slow of heart to listen to your word.

There are many distractions, many things on our minds. Please, we pray, I pray for me, for all of us, that we just might have tender listening ears for your word this morning.

Be at work by your spirit for your glory's sake. Amen. Amen. When I was training to be a pastor in South London, I was sent on a visit one evening to visit a church member who had been admitted to the Royal Marsden Hospital in Chelsea.

She was a longstanding member of the church. She was critically ill and was due to have major cancer surgery the following day. I was probably in my late 20s, early 30s, and I went just to sit by her bedside and read the Bible and pray with her.

[ 2 : 23 ] And as I was sat there after a few moments, she turned to me as weak as she was and she said this. She looked at me in the eyes and she said, Tell me, Steve, God doesn't want me to die, does he?

It was a heartfelt question. You know, there in her moment of need, lying there in the hospital. She had no doubt that the Lord Jesus had the power to heal her.

That wasn't her struggle. She knew that. No, her concern was that Jesus might not want to. Has he forgotten me? Does he know I'm here?

Has he heard me? Does he know the agony that I'm in? Does he know the scale of this crisis?

Does he know what's ahead of me?

And that question that she asked that night to me in the hospital is the disciples question in verse 38. Have a look at it. Look at the end of that verse. They say, teacher, don't don't care if we drown.

[ 3 : 32 ] Notice the significance of that. It's not so much that disciples doubt that he could do something. You know, they are pretty certain by now that Jesus, the one who they've met, who can heal all the diseases, he can cast out all the demons.

Surely, surely this guy could do something about this storm. It's not, you know, Jesus, are you incapable right now?

Are you not able to do anything in this life-threatening situation? No, it's not that, is it? Rather, like my friend in the Marsden, their problem is they're convinced that they're dying and Jesus is not bothered.

He's unmoved. He's asleep. Don't you care, Jesus? That's the question. The question then at the heart of our passage this morning is that, isn't it?

Is Jesus interested in me? Is he interested in you? You know, in the storms that we are facing, you know, maybe a storm of cancer.

[ 4 : 30 ] It may be the waves of marriage difficulties. It may be the tornado of exams that you're facing, the uncertainty of work, the family conflict, the visa stress. Jesus, do you care?

Do you know? I thought you were my savior. I thought you were my friend. Are you asleep? Do you even care? I wonder, we've not really looked at any in the passage yet, but can I just pause there for a moment and ask you whether you've ever asked that question?

Do you know what that feels like to be in a storm like that, to have wave upon wave crashing over you, not sure what's going to happen, wondering whether God really cares?

Let me say this morning. If you're a Christian and you've never felt this, if you've never had that question on the tip of your tongue or certainly deep in your heart, if you've never asked that question because you've never been in a storm like that, let me say it's only a matter of time.

There's going to be a time when all of us ask this question. Jesus, do you care? Mark chapter 4 gives us, I think, essentially two big answers to the question that the disciples ask and that we're asking.

[ 5 : 42 ] And the first one is this. The first answer is, listen, Jesus is totally divine. He's totally divine. Now, it's hard to miss this as the big knockout blow of the story.

That's what we were doing with the kids earlier, isn't it? Mark is not just claiming that Jesus is God in flesh. He is proving that Jesus is God in flesh by his actions. So if you look down at verse 39, there Jesus rebukes the wind and the waves with the words, quiet, be still.

And remarkably, the wind and the waves listen to the voice of Jesus. So much so that we're told that the wind died down. It literally ceased. And it's not just calm, but it is mega calm in the Greek. It's completely calm. This is remarkable power. You're meant to read that and go, this is remarkable power, completely remarkable. You and I can't even cross the zebra crossing out there and get the cars to stop, can we?

They're supposed to, and we can't make it happen. Jesus here speaks to the wind and the waves and complete calm comes as a result instantly. Why?

[ 6 : 54 ] Well, because Jesus is totally divine. Now, that point becomes even clearer when you read Mark 4 alongside the Psalms as we did earlier. Earlier, repeatedly in the Psalms, God is the one who is able to calm the storm.

In Psalm 65, verse 7, God stills the roaring seas. In Psalm 107 that we looked at together, God stills the storm to a whisper. The waves of the sea are hushed.

So the disciples who are raised singing the Psalms know this about God, don't they? If you ever meet God, you will know that you have met him because he's the one who is able to still the storm. I mean, they probably thought it was a metaphor, but it turned out not to be. Because here, Jesus is that God. He speaks and the waves are still. Mark underlines the point. If you look at verse 41, the disciples leave with this great fear, asking the question, who is this?

Even the wind and the sea obey him. And Mark leaves that question hanging because he wants you and I to shout out in answer, no, we know the answer. This is God. This is God.

[ 7 : 58 ] Only the creator can command the creation. Interestingly, you've seen before, haven't we, that this great fear or this terrified state of the disciples, the beginning of verse 41, is the Bible signal that you've encountered God.

Fear is what you do when you're confronted with the presence of a man who can speak to wind and waves and they listen. In some ways, you can summarize this section of Mark 4 by the transfer of fear, can't you?

The disciples are initially afraid of the storm and now they are afraid of Jesus. They've realized that Jesus is more powerful than the storm. Now, I've not told you anything that's not obvious, have I, yet this morning.

You know, if you go home and someone says to you, well, what did you, what do you hear at church today? Oh, well, the pastor was saying that Jesus was divine. And you go, well, duh, that's kind of what you expect in church, right?

That's what we talk about. After all, Christians have always understood and always explained that the one God who made the world to whom we all belong is one in three and three in one, Father, Son, and Spirit, each fully divine, distinct, but together one Trinitarian God.

[ 9 : 09 ] That Jesus is God, the Son in human flesh. But there's more to it than this. Notice the significance of Jesus' divinity here. If the wind and the waves obey the command of God, then it begs the question in Mark 4, doesn't it?

Not just who can calm the storm, but who brought the storm? Who put it there? You see, Jesus, the one who they suspect might not care about them, was in fact in charge of the storm all along, right? Not only when it was quiet, but also when it was raging. The sea and the wind obey the word of God. So God is in charge. He's directing it, which means that the splashing and the crashing on the boat, all of that was always fully under Jesus' control.

Now, that doesn't mean that the boat was never going to sink. There's no indication here that the disciples, most of whom were like seasoned sailors, were panicking unnecessarily. No, boats do sink.

The point is that the boat would only sink if God would let it. God is real. He's in charge. And he's with them in the storm. That's the point. Let me just pause here and try and underline the significance of this, because we might miss it.

[ 10 : 28 ] In the midst of the storms in our lives, of the things that kind of crash over us, we tend to evaluate God's care of us, or maybe even his existence, on whether we think that God is doing what we would do in that given situation.

You know the sort of dynamic, don't you? You know, I'm facing poor health or failing health. I'm facing grief or loss. So if God were to exist, he would do in this situation what I would do in this situation, which is take that away.

Take all the storms of life away. And when that doesn't happen, when I find myself in the midst of a storm, like the disciples did, and it looks to all intents and purposes like we're going to sink, my conclusion is that God mustn't care because he's not doing what I would do if I was him.

That was my friend's battle, wasn't it, in the master? She was convinced that the fact that she was lying there meant that Jesus probably didn't care about her, that he'd forgotten her.

But do you see how Mark 4 challenges that conclusion? Mark 4 tells you that God is real, he is in charge, and he is with us, not because he's doing the sort of things that we would expect him to do, or even the things that I would do if I were him, not because he's overseeing my personal fulfillment at every turn, not because he's keeping me out of the cancer ward or giving me a job that I love or relationships that I find easy, not because I find that my family get along all the time.

[ 12 : 01 ] No, if God was at my beck and call like that, I would be God. He would be my genie. No, Mark 4 says, I can know that God is real and God is in charge because he's shown up, leaving the glories of heaven in the person of the sun, living and walking amongst us so that we can know him and know that he's real.

Not always because he does what I would do if I was him or because I understand what he does. None of that changes the reality. In fact, it underlines it. God is here, and to prove it, Jesus stands on the boat, speaks to the waves, and they listen, and only God can do that.

And as the disciples worked out, our lives are lived in the fearful and inescapable presence of a God of that kind of power. Jesus is totally divine, and the storms of our life prove that.

They're sent to teach that. Pushing us, pushing these disciples into the arms of the Lord Jesus, who alone has the power over the wind and the waves. Robbing them of the pretension that they were sufficient or in charge are able to control the outcomes of life.

Now, I don't know what particular storm that you're in at the moment. I know some of them in this room. I've been in pastoral ministry long enough to know that there are many more storms in this room than I know of personally.

[ 13 : 27 ] But let me tell you that it is a lie of the devil that says the existence of a storm in your life means that God doesn't care or that God's not real.

Because God's existence is secured outside of the reality of your circumstances. And for God to be God, he must be free to do what he chooses with you, not what you would choose, not what you would expect, not even maybe what you would want.

And that freedom that God has, that storm-sending power that God has, that sovereign control over all that happens, that is meant to drive you to him and away from yourself.

We're going to sing a song at the close of our service that goes like this. It has a verse in it that says, What truth can calm the troubled soul? God is good.

God is good. Where is his grace and goodness known in our great Redeemer's blood? Who holds our faith when fears arise?

[ 14 : 33 ] Who stands above the stormy trial? Who sends the waves that bring us nigh and to the shore, the rock of Christ. That's what's going on here, isn't it?

The waves are driving the disciples to Jesus, the divine son who alone has power over the wind and the waves. Perhaps I could put it this way.

I think that the problem that we think we have is not the same as the problem that we really have. The problem that we think we have is that we might assume that God doesn't care, that we might be trusting in a God who is either not there or who perhaps doesn't care for me.

That's what we think is the big danger in our lives. So we think that God owes it to us to reveal himself by doing what we would expect him to do. But the storms of life and Mark 4 say to you, No, no, no, no, that's not the big problem in your life.

The big problem in your life is not that you might trust a God who you think doesn't care and is not there. No, the big problem in your life is that you might trust yourself. That's the problem in life. And the storms of life are meant to prove to you that you're not the God you thought you were, over and over again.

[ 15 : 48 ] Think about how that works for you this morning. Those circumstances that you're facing, the storm, the difficulties are not there to prove you of the absence of God, but to drive you to him.

Doesn't your weakness in the face of your failing health or your search for work or your divorce or your struggles at school or the trouble in your family, doesn't that prove to you that you're not God? There are problems that you cannot work your way out of.

You can't buy your way out of them. You can't talk your way out of them. They push you on to the divinity of Christ alone. The one who alone has power to say, quiet, be still.

Oh, sing hallelujah. Our hope springs eternal. Oh, sing hallelujah now and ever we confess Christ our hope in life and death. That's what the storms are meant to teach you.

The second point here though about Jesus is, as well as being totally divine, he is also perfectly human, perfectly human. Just come back to the story with me. And I don't think you can miss this reality either, that while Jesus is fully God, he is at the same time in possession of a fully human nature.

[ 16 : 59 ] So you might notice if you turn back to the beginning of Mark chapter 4, that Jesus has been teaching all day, right? So he's been teaching parables. He got into this boat in chapter 4 verse 1 because the crowds are pressing in on him and he needs a way to retreat from the crowd so that he can teach them.

Then in verse 35, we find that it's now the evening and this instruction, I think, to go over to the other side is presumably because he needs some rest, right?

Jesus, if you like, in one sense, he's kind of clocking out for the day. Got that intriguing line, haven't you, in verse 36, that Jesus was taken along just as he was, just as he was.

It's kind of obvious, I suppose, isn't it? But the point is that Jesus doesn't fly across into the boat, doesn't zap across space. No, he's in the boat like the rest of them, just like any other bloke.

And then presumably because he's so tired from the day, he falls fast asleep on a cushion at the back of the boat. Can you see what Mark is doing here? He is, at the same time, is telling you that Jesus is the one who calms the storm.

[ 18 : 05 ] He is, at every point, underlining to you the humanity of Jesus. Jesus was tired. He felt like every teacher feels at the end of term. He had enough. He wanted just to get his head down and get some rest.

He's submitting himself to the weakness of a human body. He's not using his divinity to compromise his humanity.

Jesus is fully man, got into the boat just as he was, like the rest of them. But there's more to it than just that, because the contrast isn't really just between Jesus' divinity and his humanity, but more than just that, it's between the humanity of Jesus and the humanity of the disciples.

It's between the man Jesus and the man of the disciples, the men in the boat. Because what you've got is you've got sleeping Jesus. Jesus, in his humanity, is sleeping at the same time as the men are panicking.

They are stressed. One is calm, and the other is at peace. One is frantic, this one, sorry, is frantic, and the other is resting, sleeping.

[ 19 : 15 ] And the disciples find that annoying. That's what stress does to you, isn't it? Right? You know when you're stressed out, because you encounter someone who is not stressed out, and they are the most irritating person in the world, aren't they?

Do you not understand, you say to them. And that's the disciples here, aren't they? They are super stressed out, and they look at Jesus asleep, and they go, don't you understand? But they're entirely wrong, aren't they?

Jesus is not sleeping because he doesn't care, or because he doesn't understand the peril. He's not even sleeping just because he's more tired than they are, because he's worked harder than they are. He's not sleeping because he's unaware that boats sink in storms.

No, he's sleeping because of what? Because in his perfect humanity, he knows that he can trust his father, even in the midst of a storm, and sleep.

Right? You get that because it's underlined for you in verse 40. Look at verse 40. Let me read it to you again. He said to the disciples, why are you so afraid? What was going to come next?

[ 20 : 19 ] Why are you so afraid? The waves aren't that big. Get a grip, guys. You know how to row a boat. You've done this all your life. Why are you so afraid? It doesn't say that, does it?

It says, why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith? Do you see what's happening here? Jesus thinks that their panic is not so much because the storm is so big, but because their faith is so small.

In other words, Jesus is sleeping, not because he doesn't care, and not because he's more tired, but rather because in his perfect humanity, he has faith in his father, that his father can be trusted to do what is right, whether he lives or dies.

And this is it. Can you see this with me? That Jesus' point is that it should be possible for his disciples to know and trust God in such a way that they too would be able to sleep in a stormy sea in a boat.

Now, it doesn't matter this morning whether you call yourself a Christian or not. Can I ask you whether you've seen this about Christian faith? The Christian faith, faith in Jesus, trust in him, it's not an invitation to live your life without storms.

[ 21 : 28 ] There are preachers in this city who teach Christianity like that, don't they? Come to Jesus, you'll never have another storm in your life. Come to Jesus, you'll always be fulfilled. Come to Jesus, you'll never have any more money worries.

Come to Jesus, you'll get the job of your dreams. Come to Jesus, and you'll get the partner of your dreams. It's a load of rubbish, right? Becoming a Christian is not an invitation to life without storms. No, it's better than that, right? The Christian faith is an invitation to know God in the midst of storms. More than that, to especially know God in the midst of storms.

So that Jesus here, in his perfect humanity, with his faith in his Father, is able to sleep while others are panicking because his faith brings him a peace that passes understanding. Now, it's worth pausing here and thinking about how this works.

How does faith bring that kind of calm? What is faith? What is the faith that Jesus is rebuking them for not having? Well, faith here knows, Jesus knows, doesn't he, that God, his Father, is bringing in him a new kingdom, a kingdom of glory and power, an eternal kingdom where all wrongs will be put right, where God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit will live with their people in all eternity for his glory, right?

[ 22 : 48 ] He knows that. That is his faith, that God is bringing that to pass in his ministry, that he is here as the king of a new kingdom. I have come, says Jesus, as the king of a new kingdom.

Repent and believe the good news. The kingdom of God is at hand. And that transfers to us too, doesn't it? Faith for me this morning is the confidence that though I am a sinner who does not deserve a membership of God's kingdom, I can, through faith in Jesus and his death on the cross on my behalf, receive citizenship of the kingdom of heaven.

I can belong to a place of eternal life and glory. I can call Jesus my brother and my friend and I can belong to him because of his death on the cross and his work on my behalf.

And I get to glimpse that kingdom today in the life of the church, but I don't fully see it until Christ returns. That's faith, isn't it? That's what Jesus understood.

That's what he knew. And that's the faith that Jesus says can make you sleep in a storm. Let me just try and illustrate this to see that we've got it.

[ 23 : 56 ] It's not a perfect illustration, but hopefully it will at least give you an opportunity just to think, right? Imagine, this is not going to be hard for some of you, especially Jeff on the back row here, right? Imagine you love cake.

Chocolate cake, right? And you have in your possession a chocolate cupcake. It's a delightful chocolate cupcake. You know, it's small.

It'll get eaten up quickly, which is kind of stressing you out a little bit, but it is beautiful and wonderful and you're enjoying it. And then, you know, you're holding this cupcake.

You're eating it little by little, nibble by nibble. And then along comes a friend and they take a big bite out of it. That's annoying, isn't it? Why have they done that? And then as you're kind of breaking a bit off to put it in your mouth, a big chunk of it falls to the floor.

I can't eat that. It's on the floor and the floor is dirty. But then imagine, I come along to you and I offer you, I don't know whether such a thing exists, but just imagine, I offer you a ticket, a lifetime supply of cakes from John Lewis's, right?

[ 25 : 08 ] So you can go in anytime you like. You can get as much cake as you like. You can eat whenever you want to. You can just go in off Oxford Street. You can go into the cafe and just help yourself from the cake cupboard.

Now, if I do that, what do you feel about your cupcake, right? Well, still delightful and beautiful and wonderful and you're enjoying it, but you're not stressed out about it anymore, are you?

A bit drops to the floor, a bit drops to the floor, I'm on my way to John Lewis's on Oxford Street and I'm going to fill my boots with cake, right? And eat as much as I can. Now, in a roundabout way, that's what's going on here, right?

Our lives are the chocolate cupcake, but we have been offered through Christ, a place in his kingdom, a wonderful, eternal life of glory and joy and bliss and wonder.

And so all of a sudden, I am not that stressed out in the same way by the storms of this life because they are only taking bites out of my cupcake and not out of my membership of John Lewis's cake counter.

[ 26 : 11 ] This, we've entered a surreal parallel universe, haven't we? If anyone is just listening to this part of the recording, I'm really sorry, it's very confusing, but you know what I mean? God in Christ has offered you eternity with him in a place of endless bliss where you will know God, your creator and savior, and be in relationship with him in a way that brings out the joy that you always intended to be made for.

Yeah? And so right now, the storms of this life are just bashing into your chocolate cupcake. And so here it is, Christ is asleep in the storm.

So can I ask you, have you got this kind of faith? Do you turn to Jesus like that for forgiveness, for new life, for membership of his heavenly kingdom?

Because, you know, this is the offer of the best thing that we could ever have, isn't it? It's all that we hope for in him. My friend in the Marsden went in for her cancer operation the next morning.

But the truth is, that night was the last time I saw her. She only lived for a couple of days afterwards and I took her funeral. But the truth was, and as I said to her and I said to her husband, that's not because God doesn't care for you.

[ 27 : 36 ] God has not robbed her of anything. Instead, he has generously given her more than she ever imagined. A glory that is incomparably better than anything this world has to offer.

And so for you and me this morning, perhaps it feels to you that in the midst of everything going on in your life, oh, maybe God doesn't care for me. Can I tell you that nothing can be further from the truth God does care?

In fact, he cares in such a way that he has perfectly designed the storm in your life to drive you to him and to reveal to you the glory and the wonder of what he has offered you in the Lord Jesus Christ.

He offers you peace, stillness in the storm. Not something that comes from ignorance or pretending that things are better than they really are, but a peace that comes from knowing that what we have in Christ is richer and sweeter than anything we could lose in this life.

unto the grave, what shall we sing? Christ he lives, Christ he lives.

[ 28 : 43 ] And what reward will heaven bring? Everlasting life with him. There we will rise to meet the Lord. Sin and death will be destroyed.

And we will feast in endless joy when Christ is ours forevermore. Let's have a moment of quiet and we can pray in our own hearts and then I'll pray for us.

Loving Heavenly Father, thank you that through the Lord Jesus Christ it is possible to know peace in the midst of storms. Thank you that the waves and storms in our lives are only sent to drive us to you and that even there, especially there, you meet us as we come to the end of ourselves and our own resources as we realise that we're not the gods we pretend to be.

How we thank and praise you that we find you to be loving and gracious and kind and merciful and giving us a treasure that we could never earn. We thank you for Jesus.

We pray please especially for anyone in this room this morning who is facing a particularly sharp storm. May they know your peace we pray. May they know your presence with them.

[ 30 : 09 ] May the waves drive them to trust more deeply in you we ask in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.