

SESSION 3

JESUS RULES

The Point

You can trust Jesus in the storm.

The Passage

Mark 4:35-41

The Bible Meets Life

If you've ever been in an area hit by a flood, tornado, or hurricane, you know you can only do so much to protect life and property. A time comes when you just need to get out of the way. The forces of nature are powerful, but Jesus is more so—and He is present with His followers in everything they face. The Lord over all creation is with us, and He invites us to trust Him.

The Setting

Chapter 4 contains some of the most detailed examples of Jesus' teaching in Mark's Gospel. In addition to the parable of the soils (Mark 4:1-20), this chapter includes two more parables about the kingdom of God (vv. 26-32). These parables reminded listeners that the kingdom was present and active in Jesus. Although the people recognized the authority with which He taught (1:22,27), while crossing the Sea of Galilee, Jesus demonstrated that His authority extended over nature as well.

What does the Bible say?

Mark 4:35-41 (CSB)

³⁵ On that day, when evening had come, he told them, “Let’s cross over to the other side of the sea.”

³⁶ So they left the crowd and took him along since he was in the boat. And other boats were with him.

³⁷ A great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking over the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.

³⁸ He was in the stern, sleeping on the cushion. So they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher! Don’t you care that we’re going to die?”

³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Silence! Be still!” The wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

⁴⁰ Then he said to them, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

⁴¹ And they were terrified and asked one another, “Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!”

Mark 4:35-37 Commentary

Verse 35: Mark included several details not present in other Gospel accounts of this event (Matthew 8:23-27; Luke 8:22-25). Mark noted the presence of other boats on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus and His disciples left the crowd, and Jesus sleeping on a cushion in the stern of the boat during the journey. The presence of these details may indicate that Mark got the information from an eyewitness, possibly Peter.¹

The earlier events recorded in Mark 4:1-34 took place on the same day. After a full day's worth of preaching, Jesus told His disciples that it was time to move on: "Let's cross over to the other side of the sea." They would have been moving from the west side of the sea to the eastern shore (Mark 5:1). Eventually, He and His disciples would land the boat in a region occupied by Gentiles who were known as the Gerasenes (5:1-20).

But for the time being, evening had come and Jesus was ready to wrap up His ministry for the day. Since many of Jesus' disciples were fishermen by trade, it would not have been unusual for them to set sail at dusk. Fishermen tended to work during the night because that's when the fishing was the best. It also limited the possibility of storms, which usually popped up during the afternoon. While the disciples may have been comfortable sailing across the lake in the evening, they were about to learn an important lesson about trusting Jesus when things get uncomfortable.

Verse 36: Since He was in the boat already, the disciples set out with Jesus toward their new destination leaving the crowd behind. Other boats were traveling with them. We are not told who owned the boats or how long they stayed with Jesus' boat. They may have been among the dozens of fishing boats that would have launched out to do a night's worth of work on the lake.

Verse 37: The Sea of Galilee is a freshwater lake, about 13 miles long and 8 miles wide. It sits in a basin or bowl, almost 700 feet below sea level and is surrounded by hills and mountains reaching anywhere from 1,500 to 3,300 feet above sea level. When cool air flows in from the surrounding mountains, it displaces the warmer air closer to the water and creates sudden, violent storms. The wave height during these storms can reach up to 20 feet high.

While the presence of such violent storms was not unusual on the Sea of Galilee, the disciples would not have expected such a great windstorm at night. Even for experienced fishermen like the disciples, the situation quickly turned dire as waves broke over the sides of the boat and their vessel was already being swamped. Jesus' disciples certainly recognized the danger they were facing.

Mark 4:38-39 Commentary

Verse 38: While the disciples wrestled to keep their vessel afloat, Jesus slept in the stern (rear) of the boat. The Messiah had found a pillow and was resting after a full day of teaching the crowds. He was at peace, even in the midst of turmoil.

But Jesus' followers didn't share His peace. These experienced fishermen realized the danger they were in and were terrified, so they did the only thing they knew to do. They went to Jesus and woke Him up. However, their question, "Teacher! Don't you care that we're going to die?" was more of a rebuke than a cry for help. They mistook His lack of anxiety for a lack of concern. They assumed that His ability to sleep through the violent storm meant that He really didn't care if they lived or died.

Verse 39: While the disciples were dismayed by the sudden storm and Jesus' ability to sleep through the events going on around them, they were completely unprepared for what He did next. Amidst the chaos of the storm and the panic and terror of His disciples, Jesus simply got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Silence! Be still!" While the disciples in their terror had rebuked Jesus, He turned around and calmly rebuked the storm that was causing all the trouble. Jesus spoke directly to the forces of nature and ordered them to calm down—and nature obeyed!

The disciples had addressed Jesus as "Teacher," and for good reason. Jesus had displayed incredible authority through His teaching earlier in the day. But in this instance, "Teacher" should probably not be taken as a messianic title for Jesus. By calming the storm, though, Jesus demonstrated to His disciples a whole new kind of power and authority. As Creator of all, Jesus had every right to command nature to do His bidding, and He had every reason to expect that it would obey Him. Jesus showed that He not only heard the cries of those who needed Him, but He also holds the authority over the issues that are causing them fear and stress.

By calming the storm, Jesus revealed His deity to the fearful disciples. By calming the storm, Jesus had demonstrated a power and authority only exercised by God in the Old Testament Scriptures.² Only God could do what Jesus had done. Only God had that kind of authority and mastery over the elements. In calming the storm, Jesus taught His disciples an important lesson about His nature and position as God's Son.

1. James A. Brooks, *Mark*, vol. 23 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 87.

2. *Ibid.*, 88.

Mark 4:40-41 Commentary

Verse 40: Jesus was not concerned with the storm. That was a problem He was able to resolve easily. But the distinction between fear and faith was a matter that He needed to address more directly with His disciples. As they had rebuked Him about their plight in the raging storm, Jesus now rebuked them: “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?” The Greek term translated *afraid* has the meaning of being cowards.

By answering His call and following Him, the disciples had displayed a certain degree of faith in Jesus. But Jesus expected more from His disciples. The storm provided the disciples with a test as to the depth of their faith in Jesus. Unfortunately, their fear of what was going on outside the boat blinded them to the reality of the One who was with them in the boat.

Verse 41: Ironically, while Jesus’ mastery over nature calmed the storm, it did not necessarily calm the fears of His disciples. They were terrified in the wake of Jesus’ miracle. The Greek word used here for “terrified” is a different term from that used in verse 40 for “afraid.” It usually indicates a genuine fear or sense of being frightened to the point of fleeing; it can also have the meaning of a reverential awe or amazement.

The disciples may have been wrestling with both sheer terror and utter amazement. Their earlier question about Jesus’ concern for their lives had carried a less than subtle hint of rebuke (Mark 4:38). But the result of their encounter with the storm certainly demonstrated that Jesus was no ordinary person. They knew He had authority over the lives of people (through His teaching and miracles), but they had failed to understand He also had authority over the winds and the seas. Part of their fear may have been rooted in a misunderstanding common among Jews in first-century Israel who expected the Messiah to be a conquering king who would drive out the Romans. Given such a perspective, it would have been natural for the disciples to wonder about Jesus’ identity. He had revealed a side of Himself they had not expected, even though His authority over the forces of nature was just what they needed at that moment.

The disciples’ lack of understanding is indicated by the question they asked one another: “Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!” Despite seeing Jesus’ deity on full display, they still wondered who Jesus was. They knew Jesus was a teacher and miracle worker. But His power over nature demonstrated in no uncertain terms that the One who stood before them was God incarnate—the Creator and Sustainer of all. Grasping this reality would take more time.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

Notes



Dotted lines for taking notes.

LEADER PACK: Divide your group into subgroups of two to four people each and bring their attention to **Pack Item #4**, “Weather Alert” poster. Like the disciples, we will certainly face experiences marked by distress, fear, or uncertainty. As believers, we can pray for and encourage each other. Invite group members to answer the question on the poster and share one prayer request or praise within their subgroup.



SAY: “How can you obey God’s Word this week?”

GUIDE: Lead group members to consider the responses to the Bible study listed on page 36 of the PSG.

- » **Trust.** Jesus is able to handle the storm—any storm. Nothing comes against you that He has no power over it. Where are you facing a “storm” in life right now? Place your trust in Him and rely on His presence in the boat with you to get you through it.
- » **Look back.** Consider previous difficulties you have gone through and identify the ways Jesus strengthened you and got you through the storm.
- » **Get in the boat.** Help someone see Jesus’ powerful presence. As a Christ-follower, get in the boat with someone who is going through a storm. Be Christ’s representative, encouraging the person to trust Him.

Wrap It Up

SAY: “The forces of nature are powerful, but Jesus is more so. And, He is present with His followers in everything we face. **The Lord over all creation is with us, and He invites us to trust Him.**”

**GROUPS
MATTER.**

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