



## Peace in the Middle of a Pandemic – Part 2 You Are Never Alone

We're going to start in Mark 4:35. I just want to read this story to you slowly and let it unfold step by step. The Bible says:

*<sup>35</sup>On that day, when evening had come, [Jesus] said to [the disciples], "Let us go across to the other side."*

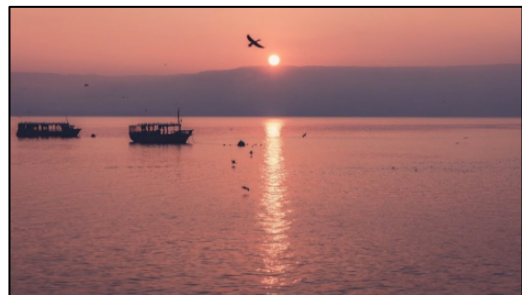
Let's think about the setting here. We're going to circle three things to get the context. First, let's understand what *"that day"* means. It had been a strenuous day, to say the least. It all started with a tense confrontation with religious leaders who were accusing Jesus of being demon possessed. Then there was some tension with His physical family. Then He started teaching by the Sea of Galilee and a crowd started coming in droves to the point where He had to get in a boat and go out a little into the water in order to speak to all of them. So they people are crammed together on the shore and Jesus is out in a boat speaking to them for hours. He taught all day without a break.

Then *"when evening had come,"* He told the disciples who were with Him after this long day, "We're not going that way"—where all the crowds were by the sea. Rather, *"Let us go across to the other side."* He wanted to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

A bit of a spoiler alert here. We're about to read about a massive storm at sea, but I want you to notice at this point that it's Jesus Who is leading His disciples into the storm. Sometimes we find ourselves amidst storms because of disobedience to God, and other times we find ourselves in storms because of obedience to God. There are things we need to learn about God and ourselves in the calm, and there are things we need to learn about God and ourselves in the midst of a raging storm.

*<sup>36</sup>And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him.*

Picture the scene at dusk. The boat sets sail into the Sea of Galilee. This is actually a picture of that sea which is situated 600 feet below sea level, then it's surrounded by mountains thousands of feet above sea level. That makes it like a bowl. The sea spans over 100 square miles.



Matthew and Luke both tell the same story, but Mark is the only one who adds that other boats went out as well. So this story didn't just involve Jesus and His disciples. They set out on the water without a Weather Channel app or AccuWeather to tell them anything that was coming.

Mark writes:

*<sup>37</sup> And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling.*



Now, the word here for “windstorm” in the Greek can literally be translated “hurricane.” This was not a normal storm. This was a fierce storm with hurricane-like winds. “*And the waves were breaking into the boat...*” Just imagine being in this wooden boat and seeing these kinds of waves surrounding you.

When Matthew tells the story, he says it was a “great storm.” The words he uses there in the Greek are *seismos megas*. It's a storm of seismic mega-proportions. He's using earthquake type language and Mark is using hurricane type language.

We know this is out of the ordinary, because in verse 40—which we're going to read in a few minutes—we learn that these disciples were “afraid.” The word Jesus uses to describe their fear is a panic-like fear. Now keep in mind that at least four of these disciples were fishermen. They made their living on this sea, so they were used to storms. They knew how this sea worked which is why they were panicking. The waves were crashing into the boat, the boat was filling with water and the fishermen knew, “That is not a good thing.” It's usually the experts who know when it's time to panic.

I know it's been said during these days you can't spell “pandemic” without “panic.” It's a lot of the experts in disease control who are most panicked. We're surrounded right now by warnings of what could happen next if we don't do this or that. But here, even as serious as this storm is in Mark 4, I don't think that's the main problem Mark is pointing out. The main problem actually comes in the next verse. Listen to what Mark tells us about Jesus:

*<sup>38a</sup> But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion.*

Now, that tells us Jesus was really tired. I'll be honest, there have been a few nights over recent days when I haven't slept. I've been working through the night on different things related to all this. I used to be able to pull all-nighters when I was in college and keep going, but not anymore. There comes a point when I hit a wall and I am out.

I think about a flight I took just a little while back. By the time I got on the plane, this guy sitting right behind me was already cashed out on the window. Then we landed, everybody started getting off, I

turned around and the dude was still cashed out. I was thinking, “Do we wake him up?” Everybody was kind of looking at each other. “I don’t know; he looks pretty tired.”

Jesus is obviously tired. But here’s the problem. Listen to the disciples. Here’s Jesus, asleep on the cushion...

<sup>38b</sup> *And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”*

The word there for “perishing” is literally “being destroyed.” Like, “We’re dying here. We’re literally about to die and You’re asleep?” That is the problem in this story. The disciples are afraid, they’re panicking and it seems like Jesus does not care about them.

Here’s where I want you to put yourself in the shoes of the very first people who ever read this book of Mark. There were Christians in the first century who were facing severe persecution for their faith. Mark in particular wrote for a Gentile audience, most of whom were facing risk to their lives for following Jesus. Many of them were afraid, panicking about what the Roman emperor was going to do next. Things seemed out of control, constantly developing every day. And many of them were tempted to think in the middle of it all, “Does Jesus even care about us? Why is this happening to my family? Why is this happening around me? Where is Jesus right now?”

It’s like a Psalm 10:1 question: “*Why, O Lord, do you hide yourself in times of trouble?*” Where are You? In Psalm 44:23, amidst distress, the psalmist cries, “Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord?” Verse 26, “*Rise up; come to our help!*” You know, there are all kinds of people outside the church who ask during days like this, “Where is God?” But let’s be honest, there are times when those of us inside the church wonder, “God, what are You doing? Where are You in this? Don’t You care? Won’t You stop this pandemic? We’re dying here.”

It’s interesting. The only time in all the Gospels that we’re specifically told about Jesus is sleeping is right here in the middle of a storm. Apparently He is not panicked and the next verse helps us understand why.

<sup>39a</sup> *And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!”*

So Jesus wakes up in the middle of a storm, wipes the sleep from His eyes, walks out on the stern and rebukes the wind. Rebukes the wind? You rebuke someone, not something. Likewise, you speak to someone, not something. But Jesus is talking here to nature like He knows it. And not just like He knows it, but like He has authority over it. “Peace! Be still!” The original language is two words in the Greek and it’s literally like, “Shut your mouth—and keep it shut!” And it does.

<sup>39b</sup> *And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.*

The word there for “great calm” is *mega galena*. It’s like a massive calm, as placid as a pond, that comes over the entire sea. Just imagine, in an instant everything is calm—no theatrics, no extravagant

effort even. He says two words and all the horsepower of hurricane force winds comes to a halt. Just two words and millions of gallons of water are muzzled. Put yourself in these disciples' shoes. What is going through your mind right now? It's at this moment that Jesus turns around and...

*<sup>40a</sup> He said to them, "Why are you so afraid?..."*

The word He uses there, as I mentioned earlier, is like a panicked fear, a total lack of confidence, like things are out of control. He says, "Why are you afraid and panicking like things are out of control?" He goes on to say...

*<sup>40b</sup> ...Have you still no faith?"*

This is where I want you to the reality of what God is saying to us right now in the middle of a storm—in the middle of a pandemic—with all the panic and concern and worry that involves. I want you to see this and let it stick with you. **Faith is incompatible with anxious fear in this world.**

Now, I want to clarify how I'm using the word "anxious" here. If you go back to the message last week, we said there are many different definitions of anxiety. The one we're using, based on Scripture, is carrying concerns in this world, like a pack on our back, in such a way that we lose perspective on life and/or we lack trust in God. So faith is incompatible with anxious fear in this world.

Another way to put it is that anxious fear in this world is a sign that faith is not operating in our hearts. So if we are experiencing anxiety like I just defined it in these days—if we're worried about what is going to happen next, worried about what tomorrow will bring, physically, economically, socially or other ways—if we are prone to panic or worry like things are out of control, if we feel weighed down in any of these ways, God is calling us in His Word right now to a faith that resists fear like this. God is calling you and me, right now, to a faith that conquers fear like this.

If you look through Scripture, the most common command in the Bible from God to His people is, "Do not fear." So I have a word from God for every man, woman and child in the middle of this pandemic: Do not fear. Do not fear. For all who have faith in God, you have no reason for anxious fear in this world. You have no reason to fear like this during these days.

Now, I intentionally said "fear like this." I intentionally emphasized that anxious fear in this world is incompatible with faith, because of what happens in the next verse. So watch this. After Jesus speaks, what does the Bible say?

*<sup>41a</sup> And they were filled with great fear...*

What's that about? The storm is over. The sea is calm. So why are these guys afraid now? The word that's used for "fear" here is different from the word that was used for "afraid" earlier. The word that was used for afraid earlier was the panicked fear, lack of confidence, thinking things were out of

control. The word that's used for fear here is a word that means reverence or awe in the face of a powerful and intimidating force. They were filled with a great fear like that...

<sup>41b</sup> *and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"*

That is how Mark ends the story and that is the point of the story. Mark doesn't end the story with a calm sea. Mark ends the story with a clear realization in the disciples' minds that the One Who commands the wind and the waves is standing in the boat with them and they are in awe of Him. These disciples were Jewish men. In the Jewish mindset, there was only One Who has power to command the wind and the waves to be still.

Let me read to you straight from Psalm 107:28-31: *"Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed."* Does that not sound like a description of what we just read in Mark 4? It goes on: *"Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. Let them thank the Lord"*—it was Yahweh Who did this—*"for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men."*

So in this boat, on that sea, these disciples realized, "Only the Lord, Yahweh God, can speak and storms be still. Only God can speak and hush waves. Only God can make the waters quiet. Only God can bring His people to their desired haven." And in this moment, on that boat, these disciples realized, "This Man standing in the boat with us is God!" And now they're really afraid. So faith is incompatible with anxious fear in this world, but do you know what faith is compatible with? I would say, "Faith equals awe-filled fear of God." That is faith and that is the point of this story. After all, that is the gospel.

So for anyone who is listening today who is not a follower of Jesus, this is the message of the entire Bible. We have all sinned against God. Every one of us has turned aside from God's ways to our own ways. We are all separated from God and the effects of that separation are all around us—in sickness and disease, in suffering and death—and we feel that right now. But the good news of the Bible is that God has not left us alone in this world. God has come to us in the person of Jesus. Jesus' name is Emanuel which means "God with us." Jesus lived a life of no sin among us, then He died on the cross to pay the price for our sin. Then He rose from the grave in victory over sin and death, so that anyone anywhere who turns from their sin and trusts in Jesus will be forgiven of all their sin and reconciled into relationship with God, to be with God forever.

I'm going to invite some of you in a moment to put your trust in Jesus, to experience relationship with God like this today. Then for all who do and for all who have, for all who know Jesus, this is the point of Mark 4:35-41. This is what God is saying to us today, right now in the middle of this pandemic. Hear the Word of God.

Now, let's be clear on what that Word is not. There's a lot of temptation for me, or anyone, to preach this passage and say, "The storms you're walking through in life are going to end soon." But here's

the deal. I can't say that. I don't know that. I don't know how long this pandemic will last. I don't know how many people will be affected by it. And far beyond this pandemic, I think about brothers and sisters who are struggling in all sorts of other storms—cancer or disease, storms at home, storms in marriage, storms in your family, storms at work, storms with your finances. I can't guarantee that any of those storms—including the one we're in together right now—will end soon.

God's Word doesn't promise that storms won't come and God's Word doesn't promise that storms won't last for a while. But here's what God's Word does promise. Here's what I can guarantee you today, straight from God's Word. No matter what wind or waves the world throws at you or me, the God of creation Who alone has power to calm the wind and the waves, His name is Jesus and He is right there in the boat with us. His presence and power will never leave us. He will see us through the storm, any storm—guaranteed—including the one we're in right now.

So let me make this personal. Brother or sister in Christ, wherever you are sitting—whether you're in a home in Metro DC, alone or with your family, or you're somewhere else in the country; whether you're listening right now under quarantine in California or New York; whether you're in Italy or Spain—regardless of where you are, know that you are not alone. The same Jesus Who stilled the Sea of Galilee is the same Jesus Who is with you in that room right now and He guarantees to get you through any storm as you trust in Him. So trust in Him. Have faith in Him. Throw aside all propensity to panic or worry. Look in the boat with you right now—the God of creation is with you and He is not prone to panic or worry. Isn't that good news? This picture of Jesus asleep in a storm reminds us that God never panics and God never worries.

Think about it. Why do we panic? Why do we worry? I think there are two main reasons. One, we don't know what's going to happen in the future. We're afraid of what could happen. If we knew everything was going to be fine, we wouldn't panic or worry. So, first, we panic or worry because of our lack of knowledge of what's coming. Two, we panic or worry because of our lack of power. If I come face to face with a lion, then I'm worried. I panic, because I know I don't have the power that lion has.

So we panic or worry because we lack knowledge and we lack power. That's why there's panic and worry in this pandemic. We don't know how this virus works. We don't know how to stop its spreading. None of us knows what tomorrow holds. We lack knowledge and we lack power against this virus. No vaccines, no cure.

But think about God. He never panics or worries—why? Because He has all knowledge. He always knows what's coming tomorrow. As it says earlier, He not only knows what's coming tomorrow, He holds tomorrow in His hands. **God has all knowledge and God has all power. God has all authority over all things, including the wind and the waves and sickness and death.** And the good news of Mark 4:35-41 is that this God with all knowledge and all power is with you. Not only is He with you, but He cares for you.

Today, God is calling you and me in His Word to leave behind anxious fear in this world and to replace it with awe-filled fear of Him. How do you have peace in the middle of a pandemic? Through being awe-filled of the God Who will never leave you alone. He promises to personally see you and me through the storm.

Will you bow your heads with me? I want to invite you, wherever you're sitting right now, to bow your heads with me. Just pause for a moment in the quietness of this moment. To every single person who's listening right now, every single person within the sound of my voice, I want to ask one primary question. If you were to contract this virus and it were to take your life, do you know for sure that you would be with God in heaven when you die? Do you know that for sure?

I think some people, when they hear that question, think, "Yeah, I think so." You start to think of all the things you've done. You're a pretty good person; you haven't done too many bad things. I just want to remind you your hope does not lie in how good you have been. That's the whole point of what we're reading. Hope lies in faith in Jesus. There's nothing good we can do to earn our way to God. We must trust in Who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. He's made the way for us.

So if you do not have that eternal security, that eternal peace, then I want to invite you today to put your trust in Jesus, to put your faith in Jesus to reconcile you to God, so that you might know eternal peace with Him. I want to invite you, right there with your head bowed, to pray and say, "Dear God, I am a sinner. I have sinned against You and I am separated from You by my sin. But today I believe that Jesus died on the cross to save me from my sin. Today I put my trust in Him. Today I ask You to forgive me of my sin. I trust in You as the Lord over my life. I want eternity with You, starting today."

When you call on the Lord God—on Jesus—to save you, He will give His peace that passes all understanding and lasts forever (Philippians 4:7). So God, I pray for those who are trusting in You right now. And I pray for all who have trusted in You. Jesus, we praise You that You're right here in the boat with us. We praise You that we are not alone. Not one of us is alone. You are with us, saying to us, "Do not fear." So remove, I pray, all anxious fear from our hearts and minds. Overwhelm us with awe-filled fear of You, with reverent awe before You, with love for You and trust in You. In Your name we pray, Jesus. In the name of the One Who calms the wind and the waves, Who stills the storms and brings us through them—in Your name we pray. Amen.

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