

WEEK 7: JESUS CALMS THE STORM

Mark 4:35–41



The Place of the Passage

The structure of the Gospel of Mark positions the miracle of Jesus' calming the storm within the context of Jesus' later ministry in Galilee (See *ESV Study Bible*, pages 1891–1892, 1894). Thematically, Mark includes this miracle within a section of Scripture that demonstrates Jesus' authority over nature, including miracles of exorcism (see Mark 5:1–19) and healing (5:21–43). While the miracles of exorcism and healing are categorically different in this study (see miracles of healing in Weeks 4–5), they are thematically similar in the simple fact that Jesus demonstrates power over the physical creation (both nature and people). This miracle itself is a miracle of dominion, a demonstration of God's power over his created universe. While this miracle of calming the storm fits within the context of the economy of old creation, other miracles in this category of dominion preview life in God's new creation (see Week 8: Jesus Walks on Water). In this miracle Jesus reveals a crucial purpose of his ministry and how he intends to rule over our world as the Lord of all creation.

The Big Picture

Jesus Christ demonstrates his authority over creation as he rescues the disciples from a storm by calming the winds and the sea.

▶ **Reflection and Discussion**

Read through the complete passage for this study, Mark 4:35–41. Then review the following questions and record your responses. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, page 1901, or visit esv.org.)



The Setting (Mark 4:35–38)

A great windstorm rises and threatens the boat that Jesus and his disciples are using. How does the narrative show the seriousness of the situation? Have you ever been in a physically threatening situation? How did you respond?

The contrast between the raging storm and the resting Jesus is stark. What does this teach us about the humanity of Jesus and his disposition in the face of threats? What does the disciples’ rebuke of Jesus reveal about their handling of the storm?

Of what Old Testament narrative does this account remind you? How does Jesus’ response differ from that of the Old Testament prophet? What does this teach us about Jesus?

The Miracle (Mark 4:39)

Jesus calms the storm with words of rebuke. What does this teach about the power and authority of Jesus? Since Jesus is the creator of all things (John 1:3), how does his lordship over all things give you confidence and hope?

There is no struggle or delay when Jesus commands the wind and sea to be still. How does this instruct us to trust Jesus with our physical lives and not just our spiritual lives?

The Conclusion (Mark 4:40–41)

The disciple's response to Jesus' command over the wind and the storm is not surprising. What does their response reveal about the human heart, and what does Jesus' response teach us about faith in difficult moments? Are there any circumstances in your life concerning which Jesus is exhorting you to express faith?

What is the significance of the question the disciples propose in response to Jesus' rebuke, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him" (Mark 4:41)? What is the correct answer to their question?

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In light of the purpose of miracles, what does this miracle teach Christians about the person of Jesus (who he is) or the work of Jesus (what he has done for us)?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

JESUS AND THE STORM. There is a simple truth present in this passage that comforts the believer: when the disciples are in danger and scared, Jesus is present with them. The full picture of the gospel proclaims Jesus not only as Redeemer but also as Creator (Heb. 1:1–2). This means that, even though life’s trials are not promised to go away, comfort can be found in Jesus, the one who dwells in the storm that his disciples are facing and who controls the strong wind and the raging sea. A product of this miracle of dominion is believers who are steadfast in suffering.

FAITH AND FEAR. The response of the disciples is understandable, given the terrifying circumstances. Who wouldn’t respond to this miracle with a sense of awe and trembling? Often, the image of Jesus is that of the servant who is meek and mild. While this is a true portrait, it is not the whole story. To see Jesus rightly is to see him as one with complete, sovereign control over his whole creation. Creation bends the knee to our Lord, the Creator. This biblical truth should engender reverent fear¹ in the lives of believers, alongside a confident certainty and hope in all circumstances, even in storms.

Whole-Bible Connections

THE BETTER JONAH. Mark’s account of the calming of the storm includes the detail of Jesus’ being asleep on a cushion (Mark 4:28). While not explicitly stated, the reader is reminded of another prophet asleep on a boat: Jonah (see Jonah 1:5). By contrast, while Jonah attempts to flee the will of God and ends

up succumbing to the forces of nature, Jesus, in complete alignment with the heavenly Father, pronounces peace over the storm. Jesus' obedience to the will of God will eventually lead him to the cross, as he is the better Jonah—not only a prophet to the nations but the Savior of the nations.

JESUS THE CREATOR. Jesus speaks peace into the storm, and the wind and the seas obey. An adjacent image in the story of God's Word is the image of a formless earth with darkness over the face of the deep (Gen. 1:1). In the creation account the Creator God speaks over creation and brings about structure, life, and purpose. As God uses words as a means of creating *ex nihilo* (see *ESV Study Bible* notes on page 49), creation is ordered and declared good. Hebrews 1:2 makes it clear that Jesus Christ is indeed “the heir of all things, through whom also [God] created the world.” In a fallen world Creator Jesus speaks over creation and brings about peace. Jesus is both our Savior and our Creator.

Theological Soundings

THE HUMANITY OF JESUS. When the storm begins, Jesus can be found asleep on the boat, lying on a cushion (Mark 4:38). This seemingly insignificant detail is not to be ignored. Jesus is burdened by the ministry and the call to follow God, and as a man he needs rest. On display in this text is the fullness of Christ's humanity. Some understandings of Jesus, while focusing on his power and authority, accidentally underappreciate his true humanity. Jesus felt the full force of exhaustion, and Jesus needed rest. This minor detail in the miracle account helps believers relate to Jesus as our sympathizing Great High Priest (Heb. 4:14–16).

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD. There is something powerful about this teacher! Jesus demonstrates creational dominion in this miracle because he is indeed the Creator himself. Present in this reality is the truth of his sovereignty.² His control over the winds and the seas extends into our lives and brings comfort in times of trial. While the sovereignty of God can often be a debated topic of theological extrapolation and overspeculation, in this miracle text it is a pastoral gift to those scared by life's storms.

CONTRA-GNOSTICISM. A heresy present throughout much of church history is that of Gnosticism. Gnosticism teaches that true humanity resides in the soul alone. The physicality of creation is viewed through a purely negative lens, as something that needs to be disdained. Believers can easily fall victim to this belief system when they adopt escapist views of eschatology (the doctrine of the end times). Jesus' calming of the storm reminds the believer that the peace extended to believers through the forgiveness of sins is only part of the story. Jesus' creational might and mercy will be demonstrated in all of creation, as the war-torn creation groans for renewal and peace (Rom. 8:22–23).

Personal Implications

Take some time to reflect on what you have learned from your study of Mark 4:35–41 and how it might apply to your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Mark 4:35–41

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Jesus calms the storms and demonstrates his power as sovereign Creator. Reflect on how this truth has comforted you during the trials of your life, and respond in prayer.

Definitions

¹ **Fear** – Has both godly and ungodly meanings in the Bible, depending on the context. Fear of the Lord is a godly, wise fear that demonstrates awe and reverence for the all-powerful God (Prov. 1:7). Conversely, Jesus taught his disciples not to fear people or situations in a way that shows a lack of trust in God's protection (Matt. 10:26–31).

² **Sovereignty** – Supreme and independent power and authority. Sovereignty over all things is a distinctive attribute of God (1 Tim. 6:15–16). He directs all things to carry out his purposes (Rom. 8:28–29).