

# Jesus Christ is the LORD who controls creation, trust him to care for you

## Mark 4:35-41

### Introduction and Context

- For an extensive discussion of the historical background to the Gospel of Mark, see the sermon outline written for Mark 1:1-13.
- Mark 4:35-21 is part of the section concerning Jesus' ministry in Galilee and the surrounding areas (1:14-8:21). In particular, it narrates the first incident recounted in a large unit concerning Jesus' ministry around the Sea of Galilee (4:35-6:6a). Mark shows us that Jesus is sovereign over the potent forces of nature (4:35-41), evil spirits (5:1-20), sickness (5:24-34) and death (5:21-24, 35-43). Where previously we simply read about Jesus driving out demons and healing the sick (Mark 1:32-34, Mark 3:10-11), we are now given examples of what these healings and exorcisms looked like.
- Unfortunately, despite the miraculous works that Jesus performs, many people still reject him. Thus, the conclusion of this unit (Mark 4:35-6:6a) is very similar to the conclusion of the first unit (Mark 1:14-3:6). Jesus was rejected by the Pharisees and the Herodians (3:6), now he is rejected by the people he grew up with in his hometown (6:1-6a)<sup>1</sup>.
- Before we come to Mark 4:35-21, we need to be aware of other events that have taken place in Mark 4:
  - Mark 4:1-34. After spending some time in Capernaum (Mark 3:20) Jesus has returned to the Sea of Galilee in order to teach the crowds of people following him (Mark 4:1, contrast with Mark 3:7). Now, he is in the boat where previously he merely had a boat ready in case the crowds got to large (Mark 4:1, contrast with Mark 3:9). Jesus then begins teaching the people by means of parables. He tells many parables and Mark's Gospel simply records four: The parable of the sower (4:1-20), the lamp on the stand (4:21-24), the growing seed (4:26-29) and the mustard seed (4:30-32). Jesus also told other parables which have not been recorded (4:33).
  - From the above, we are to assume that Jesus spent the greatest part of the day teaching people.

### Form and Structure

- The Gospel of Mark was written to help us understand who Jesus is, what Jesus came to do and how we should respond to Jesus. For more information about the overall form and structure of this Gospel, see the sermon outline written for Mark 1:1-13.
- Mark 4:35-21, known as the calming of the storm, is the first nature miracle recorded in the gospel of Mark. The purpose of this event is to bring us to a place where we ask the same question as the disciples: "Who is this that even the wind and the waves obey him?"

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<sup>1</sup> Garland, 2015: p122.

## Exposition

35: *That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side."*

- **That day.** Jesus has spent the majority of the day teaching large crowds of people by means of parables (Mark 4:1, 33).
- **"Let us go over to the other side."** Mark 5:1 tells us that "They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes." Most likely, this is the region around the town of Gergesa, though it could also be further south near the Decapolis (see Mark 5:20). This region was inhabited by Gentiles. On the map below, you can see that a journey from Capernaum to Gergesa across the Sea of Galilee would be about 8kilometres on the water. If they went further south, it would have been a longer journey of up to 15 kilometres.



36: *Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.*

- **The boat.** We were told in Mark 3:9 that Jesus asked his disciples to have a small boat ready for him in case the crowd got too large. We can thus assume that he was in this same boat when he was teaching the crowds (Mark 4:1). Presumably, Jesus and all 12 of his disciples were able to fit into this boat. It may have had a sail and certainly had several oars with which to row. With 13 people inside it, it might also be sitting quite low in the water<sup>2</sup>.
- **Other boats.** It was not Jesus and his 12 disciples who left in boats after the day's teaching. We are not told that these boats followed Jesus and his disciples. We are simply told that when Jesus and his disciples left, there were also other boats around them.

37: *A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.*

- **A furious squall.** A squall is a sudden violent gust of wind or a localised storm. The Sea of Galilee is often subject to such storms. When the cold air from Mount Hermon meets the rising warm air from

<sup>2</sup> A first-century Galilean boat unearthed in 1986 and preserved in the Yigal Allon Centre at Ginosar is 8.20 metres long, 2.35metres wide and with a depth of 1.25metres. If this is typical of boats in use on the lake of Galilee at that time, a group of thirteen would comfortably fill it (France, 2002: p188).

the sea, it can result in a storm that sweeps down on to the lake from the heights<sup>3</sup>. This storm would bring strong winds and rain.

- **Waves broke over the boat.** Even though the storm might only last for 15-30 minutes, it has the power to sink the boat. Waves created by the wind causes the boat to fill with water. This can happen quite easily because the boats which they used in that time for fishing had low sides and would therefore be vulnerable to big waves<sup>4</sup>.
- **It was nearly swamped.** This phrase confirms that fact that waves were washing over the sides of the boat causing it to fill with water. This makes the boat heavier, causing it to go lower in the water, bringing its sides closer to the water's edge. We know that four of the disciples were fishermen (Simon (Peter), Andrew, James and John; see Mark 1:16-20). They may have been able to swim. The rest of the disciples were unlikely to be able to swim and therefore there is a serious danger that many of them will drown if the boat is sunk by the waves.

38: *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?"*

- **Jesus was in the stern.** The stern of a boat refers to a raised section at the back of the boat.
- **Sleeping on a cushion.** After a long day of teaching crowds of people, we should not be surprised that Jesus was asleep. His disciples were more than capable of navigating on the lake by themselves. Some commentators argue that his sleep is a sign of his trust in God and therefore a mark of his divine sovereignty<sup>5</sup> (appealing to passages such as Job 11:18-19; Psalm 3:5; 4:8; 121:3-4; Proverbs 3:23-26). It seems more likely however, that he was simply asleep because he was exhausted. The fact that Jesus was sleeping is therefore a testimony to his human nature. He was fully man and just like we need sleep after a long day of work, he also needed to sleep.
- **The disciples woke him.** Clearly the storm is life-threatening otherwise the disciples would have left Jesus alone. Remember, not many of them could swim and if they were in the middle of the lake in the dark, they would have a long way to swim to the shore. Everyone was likely busy shouting to one another, with instructions to row harder and use their hands/pots to scoop water out of the boat. Looking around, they expect to see Jesus helping them but instead he is sleeping and they are surprised. Why is he not busy helping them?
- **"Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"** The disciples recognise Jesus as their teacher and leader. He is the one who has told them that they must go across the lake and normally, he is also the one that has been able to provide solutions to their problems. They probably expected Jesus to help them with scooping water from the boat or taking up an oar and rowing. The way in which the disciples phrase their question, "Don't you care if we drown?" shows that they were panicking and afraid<sup>6</sup>.

39: *He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.*

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<sup>3</sup> McLaren, 2017: p1566.

<sup>4</sup> France, 2002: p223.

<sup>5</sup> Garland, 1996: p192.

<sup>6</sup> There are several parallels between Jesus' sleep in the storm and Jonah's sleep in the storm (Jonah 1:4-6). Both of them were asleep as the storm rages and both of them were awoken by a panicked and frightened crew. The contrast however is that where Jonah was summoned to pray for divine intervention, the disciples expect Jesus to have a solution himself.

- **He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves.** Instead of helping the disciples as they expected, Jesus stands up and starts speaking to the wind and the waves. We know that his family thought he was mad (see Mark 3:21), just imagine what the disciples must have been thinking when they saw Jesus doing this?
- **‘Quiet! Be still!’** Jesus’ words mirror His response to the unclean spirit at Capernaum<sup>7</sup> (Mark 1:25). He speaks to the wind and the waves as if they are able to hear him. Once again, imagine what his disciples must have thought to hear him shouting these words into the wind?
- **Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.** Immediately, the storm comes to an end. This end does not come as a result of natural forces but because the wind and the waves have listened to Jesus and obeyed his command.

40: *He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"*

- **“Why are you so afraid? Do you still have not faith?”** Once the water is still, Jesus speaks to his disciples. He rebukes them for their fear and lack of faith. Clearly, Jesus expected his disciples to act differently than what they did. Having seen the miracles which he has performed and heard the words which he has spoken about himself (Son of Man, Lord of the Sabbath), they should have known that he has the ability to act with divine power. Jesus is therefore rebuking them for being so frightened when they know that he is with them in the boat and has the power to protect them. They panicked where they had no need to panic. They are thus being rebuked not because they asked Jesus for help (which was the right thing to do) but because they panicked in the midst of the storm rather than having the confident assurance that they were with Jesus and he would be able to care for them.

41: *They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"*

- **They were terrified.** A more literal translation is ‘They had great fear.’ Where they were afraid during the storm, now they are terrified. Jesus has not made their fear go away, he has increased it and made it worse.
- **Why were they terrified?** The disciples have just seen Jesus doing something which only God can do. They know the Old Testament Scripture which testify to the fact that the LORD God is the one who made the sea and controls the sea (see Genesis 8:1; Job 26:12; Psalm 65:7; 74:13–14; 89:9; 93:3–4; 104:5–9; 106:9; 114:3; Isaiah 50:2; Nahum 1:4). They would have sung from Psalm 107:23–32 about how sailors on the waters would pray to the LORD in the midst of a storm and he would calm the seas. The disciples are terrified because they are beginning to realise that the person who is with them in the boat has the power and authority of God.
- **“Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”** The question of the disciples shows us that they are beginning to realise that Jesus is someone extraordinary. As modern readers of the gospel, we already know that Jesus Christ is the LORD who has come to destroy the works of Satan (Mark 1:1-13). The disciples do not know this yet. Even though Jesus is doing things that only God can do, it is much too big of a leap in their minds to consider that Jesus, a man, could possibly be God in human flesh (John 1:14).

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<sup>7</sup> Barry et. al., 2012: Mark 4:39.

## Key themes

- Jesus Christ is fully man, he is a human being
- Jesus Christ is the LORD, he is God, he controls creation
- Jesus Christ expects faith from his followers

## Indicative & Application

### Jesus Christ is fully man, he is a human being

- In Mark 4:38 we are told that Jesus is asleep in the stern of the boat. After a long day of teaching, he is tired and therefore he sleeps. This small detail testifies to us that Jesus Christ is fully man. He got tired just as we get tired.
- The fact that Jesus Christ is true man is good news for us. As we confess in the Heidelberg Catechism, God's justice requires that the same human nature which has sinned must also pay for sin<sup>8</sup>. God will not punish another creature for the sin which man has committed<sup>9</sup>. For example:
  - If Jesus was an angel (as the Jehovah's Witnesses claim) then he could not have paid the penalty for human sin. It would be unjust for God to punish someone who is not human for the sins of a human.
  - Imagine you did something wrong at school and you have to sit in detention/you will be punished by the teacher. If you were to ask your dog to sit in detention on your behalf, that would be ridiculous. No teacher would punish your dog for something you did wrong. However, if you were to ask your friend who behaved himself in class to sit in detention on your behalf, that would be acceptable and he would then be taking your punishment for you.
- Jesus Christ's humanity also means that we can be assured of the fact that he knows about our fears, weaknesses and sufferings. As we are taught in Hebrews 4:15, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet he did not sin." This means that when Jesus asks us to trust him as he trusted in the Father, he is not asking us to do something that he is unfamiliar with. He can truly sympathise with us. He knows our circumstances.

### Jesus Christ is the LORD, he is God, he controls creation

- Although Mark 4:35-41 testifies to Jesus' humanity, the focus of this passage is clearly on telling us that Jesus has God's authority over nature. He is the LORD who controls creation. That which only the LORD can do (Psalm 107:23-32) is something which Jesus can also do (Mark 4:35-41).
- This means that Jesus Christ is fully God. We might not understand how it can be possible that Jesus can be God and man at the same time, yet that is the truth which the Bible teaches us and therefore we believe it<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> See Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 6.

<sup>9</sup> See Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 5.

<sup>10</sup> See Heidelberg Catechism, question and answer #25.

- The fact that Jesus is fully God is good news for us. As we confess in the Heidelberg Catechism, no mere creature<sup>11</sup> can sustain the burden of God's eternal wrath against sin and deliver others from it<sup>12</sup>. We need a mediator who is true God so that by the power of his divine nature he might bear in his human nature the burden of God's wrath, and might obtain for us and restore to us righteousness and life<sup>13</sup>.

### **Jesus Christ expects faith from his followers**

- Jesus expected his disciples, those who followed him, to trust him. He expected them to have faith. When Jesus talks about faith in these verses, he is not referring to some kind of feeling or emotion but the idea of trust.
- The disciples should have known that Jesus cares for them and has the power to keep them safe. Instead of calmly asking him for help, they panicked and feared for their lives. After they saw Jesus stopping the waves, they were even more fearful because they realise that Jesus has God's power. He's not someone they can control, at this moment in time they are still unsure about who he truly is, unsure about whether or not he really has their best interests at heart, unsure if they could trust him completely.
- Thankfully, we do not read the gospels today with the same veil over our eyes. We know from the beginning that Jesus is the LORD who has come to destroy the works of Satan, to free us from slavery to sin and death. We know that he is the LORD who not only controls creation, but he came into our world, took on human flesh and died on a cross so that our sins can be forgiven, so that we can come into God's presence without being destroyed.
- The result is that we can know that God really does care for us, we don't need to be unsure like the disciples.
  - We know Jesus cares for us because being fully human, he is able to sympathise with our weaknesses.
  - We know Jesus cares for us because he has visibly demonstrated his love through his death on the cross.
  - We know Jesus cares for us because he has sent his Spirit to guide us, strengthen us and live inside us<sup>14</sup>.
- Consider the example of the apostle Peter. Despite seeing Jesus' power over the wind and water, he would fear for his life and deny Jesus three times (see Mark 14-15). But after Jesus' death and resurrection, when he came to understand the depths of God's love for him and when he was empowered by God the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2), Peter would boldly testify in Jerusalem that Jesus was the Messiah. The rest of his life would be spent preaching and teaching about Jesus. According to the testimony of the early church, he would later die in Rome, crucified upside down for his faith in Christ.

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<sup>11</sup> A creature is something that has been created by God such as an angel, a human being or an animal. This is another reason why we can know that Jesus was NOT an angel. An angel would not be able to bear God's wrath without perishing.

<sup>12</sup> See Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 5.

<sup>13</sup> See Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 6.

<sup>14</sup> See John 14:15-18.

- Through his Spirit, Jesus transformed Peter so that he could have faith in the midst of fear. And Jesus wants to do the same thing for us today. He wants us to have faith in the midst of fear. He's not going to remove us from the storms of life. He's not going to give us the life of our dreams and desires and make sure that everything happens according to our plan. When we come to faith, we are not immune from the trials and sufferings of life in this world. In fact, Jesus is going to continue bringing us into difficult situations. But he does that in order to test our faith, in order to grow our faith in him. Jesus does not save us from trials and suffering, he saves us through them.
- When we experience times of crisis, we should continue to trust God. God is in control of this world; he is in control of whatever situation we might find ourselves in. We don't have to panic as if our situation is outside of God's control. God who made the world has also shown his love for us. He has demonstrated that he has our best interests at heart. We can therefore trust him to continue caring for us and to know what is best for us even if we don't understand why he allows us to suffer/brings us into difficult circumstances<sup>15</sup>.

## Confessional control

- Mark 4:35-41 shows us that Jesus is fully man and fully God. The two natures of Jesus Christ are clearly explained in [Belgic Confession Article 18](#) and [Article 19](#). The divinity of Jesus Christ is also articulated in [Article 10](#).

## Sermon suggestions

### Theme

- Jesus Christ is the LORD who controls creation, do not fear, trust him to care for you

### Goal

- In keeping with the goal of Mark's Gospel, your sermon must answer the question, 'Who is Jesus?' This passage is a great opportunity to help people see that he is fully God and fully man (thereby contradicting the heresies taught by Jehovah's Witnesses). This passage is also a great chance to comfort people who are frightened by events in this world (e.g. storms, disasters, viral infections) with the good news that Jesus is control and he cares for us.

### One God in three persons:

- What does Mark 4:35-41 reveal about who God is (Father)?
  - From this passage, we learn that God is in control of creation. In the words of the Apostles' Creed we confess that God is the Maker of heaven and earth. God controls nature. He upholds heaven and earth and all creatures, he governs them so that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, all things, come not by chance but by His fatherly hand. Indirectly, we also see something of God's justice and compassion. Justice because his Son, Jesus Christ, is fully human and will therefore be able to pay the penalty for human sin. Compassion because

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<sup>15</sup> See Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Days 9 & 10.

he cares for people whom he has made so much that he willingly sends his Son to bear the burden of his wrath against human sin.

- What does Mark 4:35-41 reveal about what God does in my place and on my behalf (Son)?
  - God's love for me is revealed in the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ. He is God in human form, come to pay the penalty for human sin and bear the burden of God's wrath. This assures me of the fact that God cares for me. If he has provided for my eternal salvation, he will surely provide for my temporal needs.
- What does Mark 4:35-41 reveal about what God does in me and through me (Holy Spirit)?
  - Jesus Christ changes me through the power of the Holy Spirit. As I meditate on his love for me, I am strengthened to trust him in the midst of the trials and difficulties of this life. He turns my fear into faith.

### **Suggested sermon outline**

#### I Introduction

What are the kind of things that make people scared/frightened today?

Why do these things frighten people?

(We are afraid of things that we think have the power to harm us, over which we have no control)

Fear can be good when it keeps us from harm (e.g. Don't swim in a river full of crocodiles)

Fear can be bad when it stops us from living (e.g. What will people think of me? What if I get infected with a virus?)

#### II Jesus Christ is the LORD who controls creation

A Explain: Where do the storms come from? Why is the water breaking into the boat? What will happen if the boat sinks? Why are the disciples afraid?

B Explain: Why is Jesus sleeping? What do the disciples expect Jesus to be doing?

C Explain: What does it mean for Jesus to command the seas and waves? What does that show about his power and authority? What does it tell us about who he is?

D Ask:

As you sit here this morning, as we think about what has happened this week, do you believe that God has revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ and that he truly has power and authority over all creation?

Do you believe that this world is not just a product of time and chance, random events taking with no plan or purpose, but it has been made by God and he rules over it for his glory?

Do you believe that when we pray to God in Jesus' name were not just uttering empty words to make us feel better, but were actually speaking to God, speaking to the King who controls this world?

#### III Jesus Christ can be trusted

A Explain: Why does Jesus rebuke the disciples? Why did the disciples' fear increase after Jesus calmed the storm?

- B Explain: How can we know that Jesus has our best interests at heart? What does it mean for him to be fully man? What does it mean for him to be fully God?
- C Explain: How does Jesus transform our fear into faith? What do we need to know about him and what he has done for us? Who does he need to send to live in our hearts and minds?
- D Explain: Faith in Jesus Christ does not mean the end of troubles. We are called to trust Jesus in the midst of troubles. Refer to teaching from Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Days 9 and 10.
- D Encourage: How should we respond when we are afraid today? What do we need to remember about Jesus?

#### IV Conclusion

- A Mark 4:35-41 shows us that Jesus Christ is the LORD who controls creation. He calls us not to fear but to trust him. He is the King who cares for you, with him you are safe. So do not fear or panic when life does not go according to plan, trust him to know what is best, trust him to care for you.

## Liturgical matters

- There are two psalms in particular that will be appropriate for singing together with a sermon from Mark 4:35-41. Before the sermon you should sing from Psalm 107:23-32 (or Psalm 89:8-13). After the sermon, you can sing from Psalm 46:
  - In Psalm 107:23-32 encourages us to know that it is the LORD who controls the seas. Singing this before reading from Mark 4 means that church members will already know something of what the Old Testament taught about the LORD. When they thus hear about what Jesus does, they will connect his work with the work of the LORD in the psalm. A metrical version of this psalm is available [here](#) (stanzas 8, 9 and 10).
  - Psalm 46 encourages us not to fear because God is in control and his rules over all creation. It contains the lines "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam." A metrical version of this psalm is available [here](#).

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