

Sermon 20 June 2021 Jesus calms the storm

Mark 4:35-41

The story of Jesus calming the storm has been used countless times as an illustration of what Jesus can do in our lives. Taken on its own in a literal sense it is a marvellous story of the power and glory of God but it is far more important and of much greater value if we look at the symbolism of the story.

But first let's set the scene. The Sea of Galilee was, and still is, notorious for its storms. On the west side, there are hills with valleys and gullies, and when a cold wind comes from the west these gullies act like gigantic funnels. The wind becomes compressed in them and rushes down upon the lake with a sudden violence so that the lake can be calm one moment and a raging storm the next.

Jesus had been preaching to the crowds that day. He was tired and so was having a well-earned and much needed nap in the stern of the boat. Then suddenly out of nowhere the storm struck. The disciples were a little frightened, they woke Jesus and he calmed the storm.

According to an ancient myth, which was shared at one time by the Jews, the original act of creation involved God in a desperate, but finally victorious contest with the forces of chaos and evil which were located in the waters of the sea. As a consequence the image of a storm was frequently used as a metaphor for the evil forces of the world, and the ability to control the sea and subdue storms was regarded as one of the characteristic signs of divine power. I quote from Psalm 89:8-9. *'Lord God Almighty, none is as mighty as you; in all things you are faithful, O Lord. You rule over the powerful sea, you calm its angry waves.'*

So this is a story of the divinity of Jesus. It is also a story of the power of Jesus. Michael Green, well-known Christian author, wrote, *'But it was not only the power of his teaching which struck people so forcefully, it was the authority of his deeds. Who was this who could address a storm as if it were a living thing, and bid it cease its raging?'*

In his miracles, and it doesn't really matter how you perceive or interpret his miracles, they were in any sense amazing deeds, Jesus demonstrates the power of God. His power over the elements in a literal sense, his power over the forces of evil in a symbolic sense.

But the story is more than that again. The meaning of the story is not that Jesus stopped a storm in Galilee; the meaning is that wherever Jesus is, the storms of life become a calm. And our lives are full of storms, of conflicts, of turmoil, of challenges. We wrestle with storms created by personal problems, whether they be of relationships, grief, or doubts about ourselves. We wrestle with turmoil created by anxiety. None of us are immune.

The message for us is that in Jesus we find our peace and comfort; in Jesus we find the ability to meet the challenges of life. It begins with God, *'When you go through deep waters*

and great trouble, I will be with you.' Isaiah 43:2. *'Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about what happens to you.'* 1 Peter 5:7. It continues with Jesus, *'Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.'* Matthew 11:28. This man is Divine, powerful and a comfort giver. You might believe in him, you might not, but you certainly cannot ignore him. The impact his 33 years on earth has had on humanity is undeniable.

For twenty centuries the history, art, culture, philosophy and religious belief have been shaped and influenced by this man. The date of his birth divides the history of the world into its two eras. The book recording his life and work has been printed in more languages than any other book – 2,060 to be precise – with more copies sold than any other book.

Of all people who have ever existed, Jesus stands as one of the great intellects of all time. His teaching has been studied, judged, analysed and interpreted by philosophers and thinkers down the ages. When a large group of businessmen in Britain were asked at a sales seminar who they considered was the greatest leader of all time, almost everyone replied, 'Jesus Christ.' No other leader has so great a following, so long after his death.

And all this from a man whose ministry spanned a mere three and a half years and who never wrote a book.

How can we ignore such a man? How can we not be affected by the influence and impact that this one man has had on civilisation? In John 10:38 he said, *'Even though you do not believe me, you should at least believe my deeds, in order that you may know once and for all that the Father is in me and that I am in the Father.'* In other words, look at what I am doing and believe. Two thousand years later Jesus makes the same appeal – 'Look at my cross, look at my resurrection, look at the impact of my time on earth and for goodness sake believe!'

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