

Guest Preacher - Dr Anthony Latham

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Date: 13 April 2025

Preacher: Dr. Anthony Latham

[0 : 00] Let's now turn again to that passage of Scripture from Mark chapter 4. Mark chapter 4 that we had a look at earlier.

And before we do that, let's just say a quick word of prayer. Lord, we ask you, Lord, to be with us as we look at this wonderful Scripture. We pray, Lord, that you open our hearts, that you speak into those hearts by your Spirit, that you lead us to understand more about Jesus and about our faith and our walk with you.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. So this is a wonderful passage of Scripture, and there's many things that we can learn from it.

I'm not going to be giving three main points because there are so many lessons, I think. So forgive me if it's not in a whole series of points, but there are at least six lessons, I think, you can look from the Scriptures that we've looked at here.

I hope to draw out, and I trust that we can get some wonderful insights for us as we go through it.

Now, Jesus had had a very long day.

[1 : 19] We read in verse 35, it was evening. He'd already been teaching, as we read from the beginning.

He'd been teaching the crowd from a boat, and he must have been really tired because it was the end of the day. And we have a summary of some of his teaching that he'd been giving the crowd. We read in verse 1, Again, he began to teach beside the sea, and a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got in a boat and sat in it on the sea.

And this is the Sea of Galilee, where some of the disciples had indeed been fishermen before following Jesus. It's a lake 33 miles long, eight miles wide, and it's surrounded by hills.

And so at the start of this day, Jesus was so pressed by the crowds that he found it best to teach from a boat, no doubt one of the disciples' boats.

[2 : 25] You can actually project your voice very well over water, and sound travels very easily over water. And we've found that out when we've been, perhaps in our garden at home, which is beside the water, shouting at one another, and people way across the loch can hear every word we say, so we have to be quite careful.

So it's a perfect thing to do, to sit in a boat, have this water, and then the big crowd listening to him. So we can just picture Jesus sitting in the anchored boat, and we read in verse 2 that he was teaching them many things in parables.

And here in this chapter, we have some of those wonderful parables that he taught that day. The parable of the sower, the lamp under a basket, the parable of the seed growing, and the parable of the mustard seed.

And the crowd would have been riveted by this teaching from the best teacher who ever lived.

That's Jesus. Jesus always seemed to have time as well for the crowds, eager to hear him.

And by evening time, again in verse 35, he must have been exhausted. And so we read in verse 35 and 36, On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, Let us go across to the other side.

[3 : 50] And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was, and other boats were with him. So we know from this that it was that day in the evening after a long session of teaching.

And they left the crowd, who presumably were still there on the shore. And interestingly, the account says, They took him just as he was.

In other words, no time to go ashore, just cast off, get going, no chance of having a rest anywhere else. And then we read in verse 37, A great wind storm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling.

This was not just a brief squall. This was a full-on hurricane force wind, the sort you might have seen on the Minch sometimes. Glad you were not out at sea.

And it's not uncommon on the Sea of Galilee. You can go on YouTube and see storms, if you look up that sort of thing on YouTube, on the Sea of Galilee. They get whipped up.

[5 : 03] The hills surrounding the lake funnel the winds down the slopes. And these can be very fierce, with large waves. And these were experienced fishermen, remember.

And this storm must have been way more than usual for them to be in such danger and to be so frightened. And the boat would have been about 26 feet in length, we think.

There's been a boat, which we think is almost the same, which has actually been found, dug up recently, on the shore of Lake Galilee from that time.

It's in a museum somewhere in Israel. So the boat was filling up. They would have been trying desperately to bail it out.

And there was every chance that the boat would capsize. It was terrifying. Once or twice I've been out in our boat, caught in quite strong winds.

[6 : 00] Never more than about 4'7". This would have been more than that. But it is scary on a small boat. I don't know if any of you have boats. I'm sure you have. But you get a sense of the absolute power of the sea and the wind.

And the insignificance of a little boat and what you're in. What was Jesus doing? He was asleep. In the stern, lying on a cushion.

Likely a leather cushion. Asleep. Asleep. Why was he asleep? In this incredible tempest with shrieking wind and waves breaking over them.

Frightened disciples shouting. Now, I think there are likely to be a few reasons. In this, we see the humanity of Jesus.

He'd been teaching all day. Possibly with nothing to eat. And maybe you've had that sort of exhaustion when you merely have to put your head on a pillow and you're asleep in seconds.

[7 : 03] This, I think, is how Jesus was. But what does that tell us about him? It tells us about his humanity. When he became one of us, he took on all of our humanity.

Subject to the same tiredness, the same hunger, the same thirst, the same pain as we all have at times. And this is so important.

Becoming one of us didn't mean he miraculously avoided all the hardships. He was and is fully human. He was shattered.

It means that Jesus is our fellow human as well as being God. Hard to understand. But that's the truth. It was as a human being that he lived a perfect life.

Even though tempted in every way as we are. And as a human, Jesus, our brother, went to the cross on behalf of us.

[8 : 06] This is the only way to save us. By becoming one of us, he was able to represent all mankind. To take the curse of sin on himself and to deal with it decisively on the cross.

The curse of sin with us since the sin of Adam, the man Adam, was lifted for us by the obedience on the cross of the man, Jesus Christ.

The curse was broken by a man, Jesus. We read in Romans 5, 19. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

By knowing about his humanity, we can also relate to him as someone who understands us completely, having experienced life here. He knows and he feels our condition.

What a comfort that is and a consolation to us when we're going through temptations and storms in our own lives. Hebrews 4, 15 says, So the question for you and me is, have we put our trust in this Jesus, who is God and man, and man who understands our condition, our weaknesses, our temptations, and who alone could save us by his sacrifice on the cross.

[9 : 54] We also see in him sleeping on this boat during a storm. We see his perfect trust. I'll try and explain that. We see here in Jesus complete trust, complete faith.

He knew his mission was to continue bringing the good news and ultimately to go to the cross. That was his destiny. He knew that. He was safe in his father's hands.

That's why he could sleep. His continuing to sleep despite the storm is because he's completely exhausted, but also completely certain that nothing would be able to stop him achieving his goal of salvation.

On numerous occasions, as he neared Jerusalem and the cross, he had to explain to the disciples that he was going to die and rise again.

His work was still to be completed. No storm or danger was going to interfere with what he had to do. He had complete confidence in his father's mission for him.

[11 : 05] And so he could sleep peacefully when all around was chaos. And can you and I see here and be encouraged by this single-minded certainty that Jesus had about his mission to save us?

From the start to finish of his ministry, he set his face to the cross. He knew nothing would hinder his work. No storm, no peril, no danger could possibly deflect him.

We should be really encouraged by this, by his determination, by his faithful obedience to the Father, by his beautiful, consistent journey to Calvary.

We see here a total surrender to what he had to do for us. No shipwreck could possibly hinder this. There was nothing accidental about the cross. It had been planned before time and prophesied again and again in the scriptures.

He could sleep peacefully. So let's be greatly encouraged and put our faith in this awesome man who is also God, who knew exactly what he was doing.

[12 : 17] Our salvation is no accident. And then we see the reaction of the disciples. Meanwhile, the disciples were literally going to pieces.

These were seasoned fishermen who knew the Sea of Galilee like probably a few in this congregation know the waters around here. Yet they were quite convinced they were going to drown.

What was Jesus doing? He was sleeping. Meanwhile, you know, you can just see them shaking him. Don't you care? They cried.

We're perishing. How could you possibly sleep in this dire situation? There was no lifeboat, no emergency services. And by now the storm was ferocious.

The waves are smashing over the boat. And we can sympathize with these disciples. Which of us would react differently? They say, teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?

[13 : 20] And in verse 39, we read, he awoke and he rebuked the wind and said to the sea, peace, be still. And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.

Not just a bit of a calm. Complete calm. Complete calm. Let's unpack what's going on here. What do we learn about the disciples that's so like ourselves at times?

Well, one of the things is we must call to him when we're in trouble. Whatever else we can say about the disciples, they called upon Jesus when things were getting really bad.

And so they had a faith of sorts. They saw Jesus as the best option to help them. They'd seen his miracles and they reckoned he might save them.

And this, in fact, resulted in Jesus waking and calming the storm. It's almost like they had faith in Jesus, but little understanding of who he was.

[14 : 23] But at least they had that faith in him to help them. Where would you put yourself in that situation? Do you have a faith in Jesus and are you willing to call out to him to get help in life's storms?

Maybe your faith is weak. But at least, like these men, you could call out to him for help. And Jesus doesn't condemn him, condemn them for waking him.

On the contrary, he reacts immediately to calm the storm. Your faith might be weak. My faith might be weak. And perhaps like the disciples, you don't really fully understand who Jesus is, because they didn't.

Not at that time. But at least there's faith and you're willing to call upon him. Be encouraged. Just like in that boat about to sink, Jesus will respond to your weak faith.

Why? Because the faith is in him. Your faith may be weak like a mustard seed. But it is in the one you pray to who can do all things.

[15 : 35] So let's not be afraid to exercise our faith in Jesus. However weak that may be. However weak that may be. Call out to him in your troubles. He always responds to weak faith.

So that's a wee lesson for us. The next thing is about his care for us. Notice what they shout out to him. Teacher, do you not care that we're perishing?

They actually were doubting that he really did care. He was sleeping. They had faith in him to a degree, but they doubted his care for them.

Do you care? They cry. Now there's a progression you see in the Gospels in the faith and the understanding of the disciples that we see clearly in the Bible.

And we read this because it helps us in our struggles to believe ourselves. They're so human in their reactions. Don't you care?

[16:35] And actually this sort of honesty that we read in the Bible makes me trust the Bible more and more. If they'd made it up, they wouldn't have put that in.

They always appear very weak, the disciples, don't they? But they wrote it. The disciples who wrote the Gospels never sugarcoat their credentials. They never tried to show how great they were. It's brutally honest. Do you struggle to believe that Jesus cares about you? Particularly in a storm of life, a bereavement, an illness, losing your job, whatever it might be.

It's difficult sometimes to believe that he cares. Like the disciples, we have to struggle with our understanding more and more of who this is we are following.

At that time, they only had a weak and imperfect knowledge of Jesus. And we're often just like them. But the good news is that the disciples did come to understand who he is.

[17:43] And they became changed men afterwards. When we see their imperfections and weakness and lack of understanding, we are encouraged.

Jesus never gave up on them. They were all he had. You and I are all he has. And he will never give up on you or me.

And so when things are really tough, and we feel like he doesn't care, take heart. Your faith in him and his care can and will grow as you read his word, trust his promises, understand his mission to save you, even going to the cross for you and for me.

We see here also his total power and his authority. With one command, the sea and the wind obey him.

Notice the verse says, he rebuked the wind and said to the sea, peace, be still. This is not a gentle prayer, but a very strong command. He rebuked the wind.

[18:53] And this is one of the mighty miracles which showed who Jesus was and is. Not just a healer and a great teacher, but in complete control of nature.

The wind instantly obeyed him. There was a great calm. Not just a bit of weight reduction, a great calm. And of course, we can know about Jesus in our heads, that he created all things.

But do we really understand his complete command over nature? This is one of the signs that helped the disciples and helps you and I to understand just who he is.

And reminds us of the first verse of John's Gospel. Or not the first verse, but the third verse, I think it is. It says, all things were made through him.

And without him, there's not anything made that was made. That's Jesus. Everything was made by him and through him. Sometimes I've had meetings with youth fellowships in the church.

[20:03] And to discuss science and Christianity. And it's wonderful to be able to encourage young people to understand just what it means for Jesus to be our creator.

We live in a day when many see science or the investigation of nature to be entirely separate from faith in God.

How sad. Most of the great scientists of the past knew they were simply examining what God has done and is doing. Which is why they were great scientists.

Science is finding out about what God has done. Nature is created by and is under the control of God. And Jesus showed this clearly in this story.

We may not understand everything about, say, earthquakes and disasters. But God is nevertheless in control of all that he has made. Then we see the words of Jesus after he had calmed the storm.

[21:07] Verse 40. Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith? Now, at first glance, you might think this is a bit unfair.

But Jesus is never unfair. He said these words not because he didn't know why they were afraid, but to help them to grow in understanding and faith.

He said, why are you still afraid? Have you still no faith? We naturally fear when things go terribly wrong, don't we? Jesus is essentially saying here that no matter what the circumstances are, even in the worst case, we can have faith in him and not be afraid.

And it's a very high bar of faith, but it's one that we should aspire to. Of course, the best example of such faith is that of Jesus himself.

He went through worse than any of us will, but kept the faith, stayed the course, and right through until death and beyond.

[22 : 17] And another lesson we can learn from this is that obeying him can lead us to great tests. We all face very hard circumstances sometimes, even when we're in obedience to Jesus.

Remember that the disciples were simply obeying him by taking the boats out to the other side. It's what he had asked them to do. And it was in obedience to him that they faced disaster.

We are also not immune. We can be doing his will and bad things can happen. Not because we are disobedient. Now, the bar of faith that Jesus challenges us is high.

But is that not a great thing? Are we fearful? Listen to those words again. Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?

Did they switch to being unafraid? Did these words of Jesus reassure them? Well, they certainly stopped feeling worried about the storm because it had ceased. But they had a different fear now.

[23 : 25] And we read in verse 41, And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, Who then is this that even the wind and the waves obey him?

A new fear comes on them. A fear of the utter mystery and awesomeness of this person in the boat with them. These were, again, I say, seasoned fishermen who had just seen the power and majesty of the creator in their midst.

They realized they were in the presence of someone out of this world. And their understanding of the predictability of nature and reality was shaken to the core.

And such power was frightening. What else might he do? Is he really good? Could he do something terrible? This is frightening power.

If he's not good, then he might do something awful. But, of course, they understood later. He was pure goodness. Their entire mindset was in turmoil.

[24 : 33] They depended up until then on the rootedness of their lives in nature. Nature was what they understood. They were fishermen. This had been completely overturned.

That stability was shaken. That's why they were frightened. And the question for you and I is, are we prepared for an encounter like this with the risen Lord?

Do we understand that he is the Lord of the universe in all his majesty? Will you not put him in control of your life?

One of the facts I like to tell the youth when I occasionally speak to them about science is the size of the universe. If you look up on a clear night sky, you may see the great sweep of the Milky Way across the sky.

What we're looking at is our own galaxy. Billions of stars. We're gazing through the enormous disk of the galaxy. Our galaxy contains at least 100 billion stars, including our own sun.

[25 : 47] Now imagine you wanted to cross from one side of the galaxy to the other. And you're going very, very fast, even at the speed of light, which is 186,000 miles per second.

How long would it take from one side to the other? It would take 100,000 years. And yet our galaxy is just one of billions of others.

That is the awesomeness of our universe that Jesus made. This is the majesty of Jesus. And what God has created is utterly awesome and vast.

And the more we look at it, the more beautiful it is. If you look through the telescopes, these wonderful telescopes that have been made, it's stunningly beautiful. Why? Because God made it. It reminds me of that wonderful picture of the risen Christ in Revelation chapter 1, 13. And we see there the vision John had of the risen Jesus.

[26 : 49] The same John who'd been in that boat with Jesus. And this is what it says. In the midst of the lampstands was one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest.

The hairs of his head were white like wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace.

And his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars. From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. And his face was like the sun in full strength.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. That was Jesus he saw there. The glorified Jesus. And so as we look back at this passage, what lessons have we got? We see Jesus the man. He took on our nature fully, sleeping with exhaustion.

[27 : 53] He completely understands us and can save us on the cross as the man, our substitute. We see that Jesus knew his mission. It would be completed.

His father was in control and he could sleep peacefully. Be encouraged by this single minded faith he had in his mission for you and I.

And like the disciples, we should call upon him. Even if our faith is weak as it often is. We should grow in trust that he really cares for us, whatever the situation.

He never rebukes us for calling out weekly to him. He's always open to the smallest call. We see his power is absolute in nature and in our lives.

And if you haven't already, ask him now to be Lord of your life. We see too that storms happen in our lives, even when we are obeying Jesus.

[28 : 58] That's the reality. That's where we are now. So let's just pray together. Lord, we thank you for this amazing story and so much that we can learn from it.

We confess that like the disciples, our faith is weak and sometimes we don't understand fully who you are. And perhaps we may not fully understand until we reach heaven.

But we do know that you care for us and that you have complete control, whatever dangers we go through. Help us, Lord, to call out to you, to find in you the rest and the hope and the peace that we need.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. We're now going to sing from Psalm 107 from the Scottish Psalter. And we're going to look at verses 21 to 30. Which actually is almost prophetic.

[30 : 11] If you look at the words of this as we sing it, it sort of almost describes the situation they were in in that storm on the sea.

So let's sing it to God's praise. Let us sing it to God's praise.

O that men to the Lord would give praise for his goodness then.

And let them sacrifice to him, O friends of thankfulness.

And let them show abroad his works in songs of joyfulness.

[31 : 33] Amen. Who go to sea in ships and in great waters trading be.

Within the deep peace, in God's works and his great wonders see.

For he commands and forth in haste the stormy tempest lies.

Which makes the sea with rolling waves. A loft to swell and rise.

They mount to end, then to the depths. They do go down again.

[32 : 47] Their soul doth faded and melt away with trouble and with pain.

They reel and stagger like one drunk. Out there with them they be.

Then they to God in trouble cry. Who then from strates the free.

The storm is changed into a camp at his command and will.

So that the waves which raged before. Now quiet are and still.

[34 : 02] Then are they glad because at rest. And quiet now they be.

So to the haven he then brings. The waves which they desire to see.

Amen. Amen. And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the love of God the Father.

And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Who will be with us now and evermore. and evermore. Amen.