

## Lord of the Seas

Mark 4:35-41 | Jonathan K. Dodson | February 8, 2014

Jesus has been teaching in kingdom parables all day, but now, in the evening, likely tired, he says to his disciples “Let’s go across to the other side [of the sea of Galilee].” The disciples make haste, and get on with their journey with Jesus in the boat. Jesus can’t get away from the crowd. Boats are following him! While on the sea, a windstorm kicks up, waves crash into the boat, water begins to fill up, and wet and cold these experienced fishermen are afraid for their lives. They are shivering in *fear*. When difficulty crashes into your life, what do you do with fears? How will the kids turn out, will the plane crash, will we have enough money? How should we respond? The disciples respond by raising three really good questions: 1) Does God care? 2) Is God for us? 3) Who is this Jesus?

### Does God Care?

A dark sky hung over the Sea of Galilee, nearly seven hundred feet below sea level, surrounded by hills and mountains, cold upper air from Mt. Hermon collided with the warm air from the Sea of Galilee to create a tempest. The text says a windy windstorm which can mean “hurricane.” The boat is rocking a dozen or so men around like figurines. But Jesus is in the stern, asleep, on the cushion. The disciples frantically wake him with their first question, “**Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?**” A natural question. We’re about to die and you, with all your power, are taking a nap. Do you even care? When the storms of life hit, we often look up at God and ask the same question. Do you care? If you do, why would you allow this to happen? Life has a way of rocking these questions out of us. Perhaps someone has hurt you in the past, or you are facing hardship in the present, a hard season of marriage or loneliness as a single. You’re struggling with anger or despair. I’ve found in counseling many angry or depressed people, that beneath their anger and despair often lies this question. I want you to observe that Jesus doesn’t rebuke them for asking it, *but* also note what the disciples actually do in their fear. They call him “Teacher” not “Lord.” They upgrade the storms and downgrade Jesus. Storms are sovereign over life. Jesus, a mere teacher, indifferent to their death. When dark skies gather, it’s easy to take our eyes off the savior and obsess about the storm. We sink into despair as we consider the “what ifs” of life: house or no house, job or no job, better or worse career, well rounded kids, marriage or no marriage? The fundamental flaw here is listening to the seas and not to the Savior. If you had this, then you’d have peace. Does he care? Of course, he is **with us** in the storm. The very presence of God. He is present. He has not resigned himself to a celestial fortress, immune from our suffering, but has entered the heart of the storm. His very presence on earth, and in the boat, in the middle of the storm, should have been enough to show the disciples God cares. God is *with them* in Jesus.

### Is God for Us?

Now, you might say, I understand that Jesus is with us, but is he for us? If he really cared, wouldn’t he prevent the storm? I’m still facing suffering, staring down debt, limping from the past. He can’t go through it for me. Life’s taught us we need to either fight or flight. Launch a prayer and then put my head down and barrel through or just run away from

what toxic. After all, fight or flight is natural. In some cases, this is true. But often its focused on self-perseveration. The disciples cry: "We are perishing!" The flighty among us treat the storms with a *speedboat*. Full throttle and speed away. Avoid conflict and change. Escape at all costs. The fighting sort navigate the storms with a *rowboat*. Head down, sleeves up, arms pumping. Get through it. Don't think about it too much. It's just life. We sum it up by saying: "It is what it is." Fight or flight avoids the lesson. But in this story, Jesus stands up in the storm to *teach* them. Have you still no faith? You can go through life fighting or flighting and come out relatively unchanged, still lacking faith. And perhaps, in Austin, we are neither speedboat nor rowboat but a "*The Drunken Boat*," a poem by Rimbaud who describes an empty boat. No crew or captain, purpose or direction, it is a cork dancing on the glory of the waves. Delirious and drunk on cultural goods, going with the flow, devouring decadence. Before meeting its doom, the ship laments for its youth, where Mark Sayers insightfully comments: "The ship does not learn, it does not mature, it only experiences." (*Facing Leviathan*, 40). Is this you, will it be you? Never learning or maturing, only experiencing? The drunken boat solves hardship with fun, avoiding the maturing lessons of Christ. But Christ would be our Captain in the storm, not only with us, but for us. He would have us turn to him, in faith, not cower in fear. He controls the wind and the waves in order to mature us. In the words of St. Augustine, "You fashion sorrow into a lesson to us." The sleeping Christ is a sovereign Christ, appointing storms for maturity, allowing sorrows for purity. He wants to fashion sorrow into a lesson, not only for us but to us. He wants it to stick, for us to neither flight, fight, or fun but have faith. Not cast about in fear, tossed as a cork, but to cast ourselves on him in faith, secure, steadfast, abounding in hope. **Is he for us?** He is the anti-Jonah, sleeping through the storm, not in sin but in sovereign glory. He absorbs our stinging downgrade, "Teacher, do you care?" and he descends into watery death for our faithless sin. Oh God cares. He is with us, right in the storm, and he is for us, bearing our insults to the bottom of the sea, where he sends up a message in a bottle, surfacing, we pluck up the glass, unfurl the paper to read the hand-scrawled message: "Fear not, for I am *for* you."

### Who is This?

Jesus awakes in the storm, rebuking the wind and saying to the sea "Peace. Be still!" (39). The wind ceases and the waves calm. The disciples respond in a final question, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (41). Who is Jesus in your hardships? A question we must ask if we are to mature. Instead of how do I get out or through, who is Jesus? Blinded by fear, the disciples lack faith to see Jesus. He indicts our fear, "Why are you so afraid?" How can he do this? Aren't our fears reasonable, natural? Well, it depends on Who Jesus is. It's clear from the story he's not an ordinary man. He doesn't respond in fight, flight or fun. He doesn't say a prayer, make a sacrifice, or plead with God to calm the storms. He just *speaks* to the wind and sea. He speaks to his creation. No wand, no superhero antics. What does he say? He doesn't say peace. The word translated peace is typically used as speechlessness or silence. Jesus is talking with sea as though it is a person. Be silent. Like his Father, who in the beginning spoke, and the seas appeared. Jesus speaks and seas are silent. This relationship with the seas would have been staggering for the fishermen. You see in the ancient world, seas were a dangerous place, an enemy to be



fought, not a friend to converse with. Ancient seas stories, both in the Bible and other cultures, depict the sea as a great force, filled with chaos and evil. It is to be feared. Job describes its terror:

Have you entered into the springs of the sea,  
or walked in the recesses of the deep?  
Have the gates of death been revealed to you...  
or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?

(A brush with death in sea was like death itself.)

Or who shut in the sea with doors  
when it burst out from the womb,  
when I made clouds its garment  
and thick darkness its swaddling band,  
and prescribed limits for it  
and set bars and doors,  
and said, "Thus far shall you come, and no farther,  
and here shall your proud waves be stayed"? (Job 38:8-17)

The sea, place of doom for men, but a mere infant for God. Seas are weak, posing no threat to him. He says to them "Come this far and no farther. Be silent." **Who is Jesus?** His dazzling identity is starting to fuse in the disciples mind, which is why they respond in fear. He is no mere teacher. Then he speaks another word, "Be still," which means "to muzzle." Why use such aggressive imagery? Remember the seas are place of danger and evil. Christ puts the muzzle on the terrifying chaos. In fact, the book of Revelation depicts beasts who devour nations and evil of all sorts arising from the sea, but by the end of the book, after Christ has returned to rule the earth, we find this statement, "and the sea is no more" (21:1). His reign is so powerful it banishes the source of chaos. Who is this Jesus? He is God, one with the Creator, Lord of the seas. In this story, we get a glimpse of his lordship, a preview of his future reign and glory. "And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Silence! Be muzzled!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." Who is Jesus? God with us, God for us, and God *over* us, over all. Who returns to depose the evil behind our sorrows. But until then, he says to us: "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" (41) In an ironic twist, the disciples switch their fears. In the presence of greatness, they see how silly their fear is. Instead of fearing chaotic death and suffering, they fear the Lord of the seas. Will you switch your fear for faith? Will you allow him to fashion sorrow as a lesson to you? Or will you remain unchanged, immature, lacking faith? It all depends on where you look. It depends on *who is Jesus*.